DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 432 778 CS 216 825

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TITLE	Effective Teachers of Literacy.
PUB DATE	1998-05-00
NOTE	89p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Beginning Teachers; Elementary Secondary Education; *Foreign Countries; *Literacy; Professional Development; *Reading Writing Relationship; Student Needs; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Education; *Teacher Effectiveness; *Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS	Teaching Research

ABSTRACT

A study was commissioned to help the Teacher Training Agency and teachers in England to understand more clearly how effective teachers help children to become literate. Research aims were to: identify the key factors of what effective teachers know, understand, and do that enables them to put effective literacy teaching into practice; identify the strategies that would enable those factors to be more widely applied; examine aspects of continuing professional development that contribute to the development of effective teachers of literacy; and examine what aspects of their initial teacher training and induction contribute to developing expertise in novice teachers of literacy. A questionnaire surveyed the qualifications, experience, reported beliefs, practices and preferences in the teaching of literacy of a group of 228 teachers identified as effective literacy teachers. Observations of literacy lessons and interviews were conducted with 26 of these teachers, and a "quiz" tested teachers' literacy knowledge. Findings suggest that effective teachers of literacy: believe it is important to make it explicit that the purpose of teaching literacy is enabling their pupils to create meaning using text; centered their teaching around "shared texts"; teach aspects of reading/writing such as decoding and spelling in a systematic, structured way; emphasize to their pupils the functions of what they were learning in literacy; have developed strong and coherent personal philosophies about the teaching of literacy; have well-developed systems for monitoring children's progress and needs in literacy; and have had considerable experience of in-service activities in literacy. (Contains extensive data tables and 25 references.) (NKA)

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ED 432 778

Effective Teachers of Literacy

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May, 1998

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Contents

Chapter 1: An overview of the research	3
Chapter 2: Teachers' subject knowledge in literacy	12
Chapter 3: Teachers' beliefs about literacy teaching	25
Chapter 4: Effective teachers of literacy in action	32
Chapter 5: Knowledge, beliefs and practice in effective teachers of literacy	45
Chapter 6: Novice and expert teachers of literacy	53
Chapter 7: Becoming an effective teacher of literacy	68
Chapter 8: Conclusions and Implications	76
References	86
Appendices	88

Chapter 1

An overview of the research

1.1 Introduction

This study was commissioned to help the Teacher Training Agency and teachers in England to understand more clearly how effective teachers help children to become literate. It began before the National Literacy Project and, although it makes many connections with this project and the National Literacy Strategy, it does not claim to be a direct product of either. However, to enable teachers to relate our findings to these important national initiatives, we have wherever possible made explicit cross references to their core ideas. Our findings are based on close examination of the work of a sample of teachers whose pupils make effective learning gains in literacy and of a more random sample of teachers whose pupils make less progress in literacy.

1.2 What do we mean by literacy?

Literacy can and has been defined very widely. For our purposes, literacy is seen as a unitary process with two complementary aspects, reading and writing. Seeing reading and writing in this way, simply as opposite faces of the same coin, emphasises a basic principle within the National Curriculum for English, that is, to develop children's skills within an integrated programme and to inter-relate the requirements of the Range, Key Skills, and Standard English and Language Study sections of the Programmes of Study.

In the National Literacy Project literacy is defined through an analysis of what literate children should be able to do. This produces the following list:

Literate children should:

- read and write with confidence, fluency and understanding;
- be interested in books, read with enjoyment and evaluate and justify their preferences;
- know and understand a range of genres in fiction and poetry, and understand and be familiar with some of the ways that narratives are structured through basic literary ideas of setting, character and plot;
- understand and be able to use a range of non-fiction texts;
- be able to orchestrate a full range of reading cues (phonic, graphic, syntactic, contextual) to monitor and self-correct their own reading;
- plan draft revise and edit their own writing;
- have an interest in words and word meanings, and a growing vocabulary;
- understand the sound and spelling system and use this to read and spell accurately;
- have fluent and legible handwriting.

There are three strands to the experiences children need to develop these competencies:

1. word level work: i.e. phonics, spelling and vocabulary
2. sentence level work: i.e. grammar and punctuation
3. text level work: i.e. comprehension and composition

The term level is used to refer to structural/organisational layers in texts. Each of the levels is essential to effective reading and writing and there is a very close inter-relationship between them. At different stages of learning literacy, however, some levels will assume greater prominence in teaching. Word level work will, for example, be very much to the fore in the beginning stages of literacy learning even though teachers will also want to enable pupils to locate such work in correctly formed sentences and meaningful texts rather than pursuing it as an end in itself.

Given the powerful role of literacy in society, it is inevitable that standards of literacy and definitions of what constitutes "being literate" should be a concern for educators. With the development of more

and more uses and functions for literacy, it is certainly the case that children need to achieve ever higher standards of literacy to "be literate" in their society. The major factor in raising standards must be the quality of the teaching of literacy which children experience, particularly during the primary phase of schooling.

High quality literacy teaching demands high quality literacy teachers and any education system must attempt to maximise the expertise of teachers in teaching literacy. In order to direct improvements in the selection, training and professional development of teachers of literacy most profitably, a great deal can be learned from a study of those primary school teachers identified as effective in the teaching of literacy.

Such a study was the aim of the research described in this report. This research project, the Effective Teachers of Literacy Project, was commissioned by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) and conducted by staff of the University of Exeter and the University College of St Mark and St John from December, 1995 to February, 1997 in collaboration with thirteen Local Education Authorities across England and a number of Grant Maintained and independent schools.

This report gives an account of the project, its main findings and their implications for policy and practice. Much of the specific detail of the research and its findings will be found in the Appendices to this report.

1.3 The aims of the research

The aims of this research were to:

1. identify the key factors of what effective teachers know, understand and do which enables them to put effective teaching of literacy into practice in the primary phase;
2. identify the strategies which would enable those factors to be more widely applied;
3. examine aspects of continuing professional development which contribute to the development of effective teachers of literacy;
4. examine what aspects of their initial teacher training and induction contribute to developing expertise in novice teachers of literacy.

The research was designed to answer these questions by gathering evidence in the following ways:

- a questionnaire survey of the qualifications, experience, reported beliefs, practices and preferences in teaching literacy of a group of 228 teachers identified by the research team as effective in the teaching of literacy on the basis of a range of data including pupil learning gains.
- observations of literacy lessons given by 26 of these effective teachers of literacy.
- interviews with these 26 teachers about the content, structure and organisation of the lessons observed and about the knowledge underpinning them.
- a 'quiz' designed to test teachers' subject knowledge about literacy.

Both quantitative data and qualitative data were collected to build up as full a picture as possible of the knowledge, beliefs and teaching practices of a group of teachers identified as effective at teaching literacy. Similar data was also collected from a sample of "ordinary" teachers (referred to as the validation group) and from a group of student teachers (novice teachers). Thus the findings from the effective teacher sample could be compared and validated against those from the two other teacher groups.

Full details about the research methods used and background details of the teachers involved can be found in Appendices 2 and 3.

1.4 Research hypotheses

From a review of the existing research literature on effective teachers in general and effective teachers of literacy in particular, a number of specific hypotheses were generated which our research then set out to test. A full account of this review of literature is given in Appendix 1 of this report. The research hypotheses that were derived from it are given here so that readers may have these clearly in mind as they read our account of the main findings of the research.

1.4.1 Overview

From our literature review of the characteristics of effective teachers, three key areas emerged. Effective teachers appeared to:

- systematically employ a range of teaching methods, materials and classroom tasks matched to the needs of the specific children they are teaching
- have coherent beliefs about the teaching of their subject
- have a well developed knowledge of the subject and its pedagogical principles which underpins their teaching

A crucial point we need to make here is that, in the majority of areas, research had not yet demonstrated that these features were characteristic of effective teachers of literacy. However, we hypothesised that our research would suggest this to be the case and, therefore, we extrapolated from the general research on effective teachers, and from our own extensive knowledge of the field of literacy, to develop a number of specific hypotheses.

1.4.2 Specific hypotheses

1.4.2.1 Methods of teaching

The literature on effective teaching in literacy suggests that there are several teaching techniques that appear to be linked with pupil progress in reading and writing. Our hypothesis was that effective teachers of literacy were likely to employ such techniques in a strategic way; that is, with a very clear purpose linked to the identified literacy needs of specific pupils. The teaching techniques we expected to find being employed included the following:

- The deliberate teaching of the codes of written language. Such teaching was, we felt, most likely to be systematic, i.e. planned rather than simply *ad hoc*. "Codes" here referred to textual features at word, sentence and text levels and included:
    1. sound-symbol correspondences, e.g. the most usual pronunciations of letters and letter groupings, letter recognition etc.
    2. word features and their structures, for example, syllables, prefixes, suffixes, inflections etc.
    3. spelling patterns, e.g. *ight*, *ei* (as in *weir*, *their*, *weigh*) etc.
    4. vocabulary and word study, e.g. looking at synonyms, exploring word origins, vocabulary broadening.
    5. punctuation, e.g. the effects of punctuation signs such as commas and question marks on text meaning.
    6. grammatical constructions, e.g. subject-verb agreement, conjunctions.
    7. text structures, e.g. narrative elements such as plot, setting, character, expository text features such as argument structure.
- The creation of "literate environments" which enhanced children's understandings of the functions of literacy and gave opportunities for regular and sustained practice of literacy skills, e.g. encouraging children to write for a range of audiences, provision of literacy materials in dramatic play areas, use of labels and notices to draw children's attention to the use of literacy etc.
- The provision of a range of models and examples of effective literacy practices, either provided by the teacher him/herself, for example by demonstrating writing, including revision and drafting, or provided by displays of successful literacy outcomes and skill use, either from children's own work or from published materials.
- The use of praise and constructive criticism in response to children's literacy work with a view to consolidating success, correcting errors and promoting growth.
- The design and provision of focused tasks with academic content which would engage children's full attention and enthusiasm and which was appropriate to their ages and abilities.
- The continuous monitoring of children's progress through the tasks provided and the use of informal assessment to give a basis for teaching and reporting on this progress.

1.4.2.2 Belief systems

Teacher beliefs are theorised as important in effective teaching. The literature is weak, however, in terms of evidence about the ways beliefs link to practice, especially in the teaching of literacy. We, therefore, deliberately set out to investigate this linkage and our working hypothesis was that effective teachers of literacy would have a coherent set of beliefs about the nature and the learning of literacy which played a guiding role in their selection of teaching approaches.

An example of this linkage not working is the writing lesson (not uncommon in primary schools according to the literature) in which the teacher stresses to the children that the outcome should be "an exciting story, with plenty of action and good ideas" but then proceeds in her reactions to their writing to emphasise exclusively the need for accuracy in spelling and presentation without reference to the declared criteria of excitement, action and good ideas. Most children learn very quickly to put their efforts into what their teacher *really* wants from the writing, but we hypothesised that this dissonance between a teacher's reported beliefs about what s/he was aiming for in teaching and the real criteria for the task was less than effective in terms of children's progress. Beliefs (or rhetoric) and reality which were consonant were more likely, we hypothesised, to promote such progress.

1.4.2.3 Subject knowledge.

There is evidence that effective teachers of other subjects tend to possess a well developed knowledge base in those subjects. Such a knowledge base appears to consist of knowledge about content, knowledge about children and their learning and knowledge about how to teach the subject effectively. It had not yet, however, been established that effective teachers of literacy were in a similar position with regard to their 'subject'. We hypothesised that there would be a link between effective teaching of literacy and subject knowledge.

In defining subject knowledge in literacy we were forced to extrapolate from more general studies of subject knowledge and used a three-part model to guide our research. Subject knowledge, we felt, consisted of:

- Knowledge of content, i.e. what is it that children need to learn in literacy in order to be counted as successful?
- Knowledge about effective pedagogy, i.e. what are the accepted principles underlying the teaching of literacy, for example, the sequence of teaching, the contexts in which literacy might best be learnt?
- Knowledge about learners and how they learn and knowledge of the particular children in their class, i.e. how do children learn to read, write and use language effectively and what are the capabilities of the children in their classes?

The most problematic of the above was content knowledge. Defining this is complex, largely because content in literacy covers both knowledge (e.g. knowledge of literature, knowledge of the linguistic system) and skills. Literacy teachers teach children *about* reading and writing and *how to* read and write. Success in literacy is measured not by what children know about texts, print etc. but by what they can do with these.

Literacy skills are, and should be, taught directly. It is well documented, however, that learners have difficulty in transferring their skills to alternative contexts and in literacy this transfer can only be tested and observed in settings other than those in which the literacy skills were taught. To enable this essential transfer of skills in literacy, learners need to be given plenty of guided opportunities to put their literacy into practice. Content knowledge in literacy had, therefore, also to include knowledge of the ways reading and writing were used as tools for learning.

The relationship between content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge also seemed complicated in literacy. Some content knowledge is essential for learners of literacy but some may be essential for teachers yet not directly useful in effective literacy performance. Linguistic terminology is an example of this. Although it is true that children need to know some linguistic terms, such as 'sentence' and 'word', there is little evidence that children's reading or writing is improved by explicit knowledge of such terminology as 'predicate' or 'subordinate clause'. Yet in order to plan effective and progressive

learning experiences for children and discuss the significance of language structures with children, teachers of literacy, we hypothesised, did need to have this knowledge.

With these considerations in mind, we developed the following component list of subject knowledge in literacy. In each component we included the relevant knowledge of content, of pedagogy and of learners. This list took account of the teaching content specified in the documents relating to the National Literacy Project. Our working hypothesis was that effective teachers of literacy were likely to have a sounder grasp of this subject knowledge than novice or less effective teachers and the list formed the basis of the subject knowledge instrument we developed for the second phase of observation and interview.

1.4.3 Subject knowledge in literacy: components

1. Word and sub-word level (phonics, spelling and vocabulary)
2. Sentence level (grammar and punctuation)
3. Text level (comprehension and composition)
4. Beyond individual texts (range and purpose)

The component list given above requires some exemplification to make it clearer. The expanded list, with examples, follows:

1. Word and sub-word level
    - phonological and alphabetical knowledge, e.g. knowing letter shapes, knowing that words are built up from letters and letter groups with sound values, knowing that a crucial unit in word attack is the syllable with its initial onset sound and its rime (the remainder of the syllable), knowing that analogy is a useful strategy in word recognition (having read *peak* makes it easier to read *beak*).
    - knowledge of spelling strings and patterns, e.g. knowing the patterned basis to spelling (there are a limited number of possible spellings for individual syllables), understanding the role of morphemes in spelling (*-ed, -ing, sub-, pre-* etc.). Also knowing about typical sequences of development in children's abilities to spell conventionally.
    - vocabulary knowledge, e.g. being able to help children explore word origins and extend vocabulary, knowing about synonyms, antonyms, homonyms and homophones. Also understanding the importance of developing a core of words which are instantly recognisable to children.

2. Sentence level
    - grammatical knowledge, e.g. knowing word classes (i.e. nouns, verbs, adjectives), grammatical functions in sentences (i.e. subject, verb, object), syntax (i.e. word order and the relationship between words and in sentences), and having command of suitable language with which to discuss these features with children. Also having an understanding about the ways in which children acquire syntactic knowledge.
    - punctuation knowledge, e.g. knowing the uses and functions of a range of punctuation marks. Also understanding the likely course of children's learning about these.

3. Text level
    - knowledge of text structures, e.g. knowing that types of texts (stories, arguments, explanations, instructions) are structured differently, understanding the structural differences between types of texts and being able to talk meaningfully about these differences with children.
    - knowledge of text features, e.g. knowing that stories have plots, events and characters, understanding typical developmental sequences in children's appreciation of these elements.
    - knowledge of comprehension processes,.e.g. understanding the importance of previous knowledge, of question setting and of adopting appropriate strategies for reading. Also understanding how comprehension develops and might be facilitated.

- knowledge of composition processes, e.g. understanding elements of the writing process such as drafting, revising, editing, proof-reading. Also understanding likely developmental sequences in children's abilities to use these processes.

4. Beyond individual texts
    - knowledge of literature for children, e.g. knowing a range of suitable literature and authors for particular children, having some understanding of quality in children's literature, understanding how to enhance children's responses to literature.
    - knowledge of the purposes and functions of various texts in social discourse, e.g. knowing the ways in which text function and structure are linked.
    - knowledge of the ways in which literacy enables learning in a range of areas and of how opportunities for such development may be created.

1.4.4 Hypotheses regarding teacher development

In addition to the above hypotheses regarding effective teachers of literacy, we also explored the ways in which teachers developed those characteristics. Our initial hypothesis here was that simply attending an in-service course would be insufficient to promote teacher development but that this demanded a much more extensive and elaborated experience of learning, understanding and internalising knowledge about how children become literate and how effective teachers promote this. Wider research into teachers' professional development suggests that a significant factor is the opportunity, with appropriate stimulus and support, to construct, over a period of time, personal, practical theories about teaching in their subject. Our hypothesis was that experiences such as action research or involvement with projects such as the National Writing Project would emerge as significant catalysts in the development of effective teachers of literacy.

1.5 The main findings of the research: a summary

In the rest of this report we will present findings from the research which give a relatively coherent picture of the subject knowledge, beliefs and teaching practices of effective teachers of literacy. We believe there is a great deal to be learnt from a close study of these features. At this point, however, we give a brief preview of some of our major findings. Broadly speaking, we found that the effective teachers of literacy in this study tended to:

- Believe that it is important to make it explicit that the purpose of teaching literacy is enabling their pupils to create meaning using text. While almost all teachers would also endorse this aim, the effective teachers of literacy we studied were very specific about how literacy activities at the whole text, word and sentence levels contributed to such meaning creation.

- Centred much of their teaching of literacy around 'shared' texts, that is, texts which the teacher and children either read or wrote together. Shared texts were used as a means of making the connections between text, sentence and word level knowledge explicit to children, both as a vehicle for teaching specific ideas at text, sentence and word levels and for showing how the features of words, sentences and texts work together.

- Teach aspects of reading and writing such as decoding and spelling in a systematic and highly structured way and also in a way that made clear to pupils why these aspects were necessary and useful.

- Emphasise to their pupils the functions of what they were learning in literacy. Thus the rules of grammar, for example, were not usually taught as discrete items of knowledge, but as connected features which would help children improve their writing for specific purposes.

- Have developed strong and coherent personal philosophies about the teaching of literacy which guided their selection of teaching materials and approaches. These philosophies enabled them to pull together their knowledge, skills and beliefs in this area and helped give greater co-ordination to their teaching of literacy.

- Have well developed systems for monitoring children's progress and needs in literacy and use this information to plan future teaching.

- Have extensive knowledge about literacy although not necessarily in a form which could be abstracted from the context of teaching it.

- Have had considerable experience of in-service activities in literacy, both as learners and, often, having themselves planned and led such activities for their colleagues.

- Be, or have been, the English subject co-ordinator in their schools.

We will use this pattern of characteristics as a framework for exploring the implications of our findings for the initial training and continuing professional development of teachers of literacy.

1.6 The outline of the report

There are seven main sections to the report that follows. These are:

- Chapter 2: The subject knowledge of effective teachers of literacy. In this chapter we present and discuss our findings concerning the subject knowledge that underpinned the work of the effective teachers of literacy.

- Chapter 3: Teachers' beliefs about literacy teaching. Here we discuss the beliefs and belief systems about literacy and its teaching that appeared to guide the effective teachers in their practice.

- Chapter 4: Effective teachers of literacy in action. Subject knowledge in and beliefs about literacy combined to produce some characteristic teaching practices and in this chapter we present the main features of these.

- Chapter 5: Knowledge, beliefs and practice in effective teachers of literacy. These three sets of characteristic features were working together in the effective teachers of literacy and in this chapter we discuss the ways in which these connections were shown, illustrating this through detailed case studies of two teachers.

- Chapter 6: Expert and novice teachers of literacy. Here we describe our findings in the second strand of our study: an examination of student / novice teachers and a comparison of these with more expert teachers of literacy.

- Chapter 7: Becoming an effective teacher of literacy. One of the main questions guiding the research concerned the professional development experiences which had enabled our main target group of teachers to become effective in the teaching of literacy. In this chapter we discuss our findings about this.

- Chapter 8: Conclusions and implications. Here we summarise the major findings of the research and draw out what we consider to be its main implications for policy and practice.

Chapter 2

Teachers' subject knowledge in literacy

2.1 Introduction

A central hypothesis of this research was that there would be a clear relationship between effectiveness in teaching literacy and teachers' subject knowledge in literacy. However, defining subject knowledge in literacy is by no means simple. In this chapter we discuss ways of defining literacy subject knowledge before presenting our findings concerning the subject knowledge which appeared to underpin the effective teachers of literacy in our study.

2.2 Subject Knowledge

It has been claimed (Ausubel, 1968) that the most important factor determining what learners take from any experience of teaching is what they already know about what is being taught. Such a view is readily accepted by most researchers and theorists in the field of learning and rests on an analysis of learning as the progressive building, reshaping and fine tuning of learners' schemas, that is, their mental maps of various aspects of the world around them (Rumelhart, 1980). If this view of learning is accepted, then in order to maximise children's learning, teachers need to have ways of taking into account the knowledge and ideas that children bring to a particular lesson. Bennett (1993) argues that teachers are generally poor at doing this and he attributes this to an often fairly inadequate grasp of the subject being taught. Bennett asks the crucial question, "How can teachers teach well knowledge that they do not fully understand?" (p.6).

Such a concern for teachers' subject knowledge has underpinned the research of Shulman (1986) in the USA who argues that research on teaching has almost always ignored a key feature of classroom life: the subject matter. This concept of subject knowledge has since become a key focus for research and was given emphasis, for example, in the "Three Wise Men" report (Alexander, Rose & Woodhead, 1992), which stated the belief that "subject knowledge is a critical process at every point in the teaching process: in planning, assessing and diagnosing, task setting, questioning, explaining and giving feedback". Shulman (1987) has outlined seven knowledge bases which underlie teacher understanding:

- Content knowledge (the amount and organisation of knowledge about a subject in the mind of the teacher)
- General pedagogical knowledge (knowledge of the broad principles and strategies of classroom management, transcending any one subject area)
- Curriculum knowledge (knowledge of the materials and programmes which support and guide the teaching of a subject)
- Pedagogical-content knowledge (knowledge of ways of transforming content in order to represent it for others)
- Knowledge of learners and their characteristics (knowledge and expectations of typical and of particular learners)
- Knowledge of educational contexts (knowledge of particular classrooms, schools, communities and cultures within which education occurs)
- Knowledge of educational ends (knowledge of agreed purposes for and values underpinning educational endeavour)

From this conceptualisation it is apparent that teachers' subject knowledge embodies a good deal more than their knowledge of the content of what they will teach. It clearly also includes what Alexander, Rose & Woodhead (1992) refer to as 'an understanding of how children learn'.

While Shulman's conceptualisation of teacher subject knowledge is not universally accepted, evidence seems to be accumulating regarding the importance of subject knowledge in effective teaching. Borko et al (1988), for example, found that student teachers with strong subject knowledge tended to plan

lessons in less detail and were more responsive to the needs of particular groups of pupils. Grossman, Wilson & Shulman (1989) found that student teachers with specialist knowledge tended to teach it in a way which encouraged children to develop complex conceptual structures of their own. Students without this knowledge tended simply to 'deliver' the content prescribed, relying more heavily on the abilities of children to memorise it. Bennett's research (e.g. Bennett & Turner-Bissett, 1993) into student teacher development found that students with specialist knowledge in Music and Science were significantly more able to engage their pupils at a conceptual level in these subjects than were students without these specialisms, although the same was not true of students with specialist knowledge in mathematics.

2.3 Subject knowledge in teaching literacy

There is evidence that effective teachers of other subjects tend to possess a well developed knowledge base in those subjects. Such a knowledge base appears to consist of knowledge about content, knowledge about children and their learning and knowledge about how to teach the subject effectively. It has not yet, however, been established that effective teachers of literacy are in a similar position with regard to their 'subject'.

An important point to make here is to stress the difference between English as a school subject and literacy. There is evidence that the subject knowledge of specialist English teachers (at secondary level) is specific, well developed and largely literature-focused (Poulson & Radnor, 1996). But teachers of literacy are not necessarily English subject specialists. The effective teachers of literacy studied in this research, although more likely to have an English subject background than teachers in the validation sample, were not highly qualified in English. 66.7% of them had an A level in English or a related subject but only 37.8% had pursued this subject to degree level. Literacy is not, in fact, a 'subject' in the usual sense, with clearly defined boundaries and conventions. Its content draws upon a number of disciplines including the psychology of learning, child language development, linguistics and literary criticism and is best expressed as a series of inter-linking processes rather than a body of knowledge.

In defining subject knowledge in literacy, therefore, we were forced to extrapolate from more general studies of subject knowledge and used a three part model as a starting point for our analysis. Subject knowledge in literacy could be considered as broadly consisting of three connected but distinct components:

- Knowledge of literacy content and functions, i.e. what children need to learn in literacy in order to be counted as successful.
- Pedagogical content knowledge, i.e. how the content and processes of literacy can be represented successfully to children.
- Knowledge about learners and the ways in which they learn, i.e. how do children learn to read, write and use language effectively and what are the capabilities of the pupils currently being taught?

5.4 Content knowledge in teaching literacy

The most problematic of the above was content knowledge and defining this in literacy, as we argued in the previous chapter, did not prove easy. Content in literacy covers both knowledge (e.g. knowledge of literature, knowledge of the linguistic system) and skills. Literacy teachers teach children *how to* read and write as well as *about* reading and writing. Success in literacy is measured not by what children know about texts, print etc. but by what they can do in literacy.

A further issue for teacher's content knowledge is that although all primary teachers are effective readers and writers and have demonstrated this through examination success, they learned these skills without necessarily having become explicitly aware of them. The degree to which an awareness of one's own language use is necessary is a very problematic issue which has long been discussed by authors such as Morris (1973).

During the project we began by defining content knowledge as involving knowledge of the use and function of the following elements of literacy:

- The use and function of word and sub-word level aspects of language (phonics, spelling and vocabulary) and the relationship of these to other levels of language.
- The use and function of word of sentence level aspects of language (grammar and punctuation) and the relationship of these to other levels of language.
- The use and function of text level aspects of language (comprehension and composition) and the relationships between these.
- Understanding the use, function and relationships of text types and texts (range and purpose).

A more detailed list of the components of these elements is given in the previous chapter where we spell out our initial hypotheses regarding the literacy content knowledge of effective teachers of literacy.

The evidence of the project suggests that effective teachers of literacy use a limited range of content knowledge but do so in characteristic ways which suggest that their knowledge is functional and context specific. The project also has some evidence that effective teachers' content knowledge cannot readily be separated from their pedagogical content knowledge. The knowledge appears to exist for teachers in the ways they operationalise it for their pupils. Teachers may have evolved this working knowledge from a theoretical content base but the way it was manifested was through their use of it in teaching.

The project used a range of methods to investigate teachers' subject knowledge in literacy. In the initial questionnaire we asked teachers what children needed to know about literacy at key points in their learning. We administered a test of literacy knowledge ('the literacy quiz') to both sub-samples of effective teachers and validation teachers and also observed these teachers teaching literacy lessons. The explicit focus of one round of such observations was the literacy content being taught and we interviewed the teachers about this at the conclusion of the lessons. These sources of data were used to build up a picture of teachers' literacy subject knowledge and will be described in more detail in the sections following.

2.5 What do children need to know?

In the initial questionnaire teachers were asked to state what they thought children needed to know about reading and writing at two points in their development: when they first encountered literacy and at the beginning of Key Stage 2 of the National Curriculum.

The responses were analysed by creating categories. We analysed the frequency of each category and we were able to build a picture of the knowledge that these teachers said they thought was important for children.

2.6 Knowledge about reading

The results show some differences between their reports about the items of knowledge needed for the two ages of children and between the responses from the two groups of teachers. For children just beginning reading, the features mentioned in more than 4% of responses of either group are displayed in the Table below.

What children need to learn when they first encounter reading	% of effective teacher responses	% of validation group responses
reading is enjoyable	23.1	15.9
books/words carry meaning	14.7	9.3
directionality and print awareness	6.2	7.0
phonic cues	4.7	10.3
book structure and handling	4.6	16.2
there are different purposes for reading	4.6	4.7
phonological awareness	4.4	16.2
books are an imaginative experience	4.3	2.8
sight vocabulary	2.7	9.3

Although most of these categories were mentioned by both groups of teachers, there were some differences in the proportion of responses and the relative importance accorded to particular items. The effective teachers of literacy highlighted the importance of children knowing that reading is enjoyable. They were also more likely to mention that children should realise that text carries meaning and should be aware that print is structured in particular ways, for example, running from left to right. The validation teachers had a different order of priorities, emphasising the transmission of specific knowledge such as book structure and phonological awareness above understanding the purpose of different aspects of text.

This might suggest a different view of the sequence of children's learning about literacy in the two groups. The effective teachers tended to be concerned for the child just beginning reading to be motivated to read and to understand from the outset the purpose of reading. This is not to say they discounted the technical skills pupils need in order to put such understanding to work; rather they wanted children to see these skills as an important means to a significant end. The validation teachers saw the first priorities in learning to read as the technical concepts - book handling and phonological awareness.

The teachers' reported feelings about what was important at Key Stage 2 are shown in the following table.

What children need to learn about reading when they begin Key Stage 2	% of effective teacher responses	% of validation group responses
read a range of texts	11.2	8.7
read for information/understanding	11.2	13.1
reading is enjoyable	8.5	8.8
skim, scan and extract information	7.5	7.7
use reference skills	5.8	2.7
makes inferences and interpret texts	5	6.6
make appropriate choices of reading material	4.9	6.0
there are different purposes for reading	4.8	3.3
read aloud with expression and fluency	4.8	7.1
recognise different stylistic features of text	4.2	1.1
discuss reading with reference to the text	4.2	4.4

With the exception of the enjoyment of reading, all these categories of response were different from those given in response to the question about beginning reading, which suggests that all these teachers were aware of developmental progression in learning. The effective teachers made greater mention of reading a range of texts than the validation teachers but, in general, the reported priorities of both groups were quite similar. All the teachers placed emphasis upon children's use of reading to learn, their use of a range of texts and their enjoyment of reading. Their responses indicate a concern with the teaching of reading as a skill applicable in other curriculum areas.

2.7 Knowledge about writing.

For children just beginning writing the responses of both groups of teachers are displayed in the following table.

What children need to learn when they first encounter writing	% of effective teacher responses	% of validation group responses
writing carries meaning	10.3	10.3
writing has a range of purposes	9.3	6.9
writing communicates/has an audience	8.2	5.4
letter formation	8.0	17.2
knowledge of directionality	6.1	6.4
pencil grip	6.0	7.9
writing is valued	4.2	0.5

The effective teachers of literacy mentioned aspects of knowledge about writing (that it carries meaning, has a range of purposes and has an audience) most often. The validation teachers mentioned letter formation most often. As with reading knowledge, this suggests a different view of the starting points in teaching early writing and the effective teachers seemed concerned for children to understand the purpose and role of writing from the outset so that they could, for example, see the need for technical skills such as forming legible letters as a means towards communicating meaning in writing.

The teachers' reported feelings about what was important at Key Stage 2 are shown in the following table.

What children need to learn about writing when they begin Key Stage 2	% of effective teacher responses	% of validation group responses
widening range of purposes, forms, audiences and genres	15.8	10.9
redrafting	6.5	4.0
purpose and audience determine form	6.4	6.8
syntax and grammar	6.4	10.2
more complex content and vocabulary	5.8	5.7
punctuation	6.7	11.9
writing processes (drafting, revising, editing, publishing)	5.7	3.4
spelling skills	4.3	4.5
handwriting skills	4.3	8.6
appropriate handwriting and spelling for purpose	4.2	2.3
plot and character as stylistic devices	2.2	4.0

With the exception of a concern that children should know about the purposes of writing, the KS2 responses were different from those for early writing and indicate that these teachers had different concerns for different age levels.

The effective teachers mentioned writing forms and processes more than transcription elements such as spelling, punctuation and handwriting, although these were still mentioned by a proportion of them. The validation teachers seemed to place emphasis on punctuation, handwriting and grammar. Both groups were concerned with the range of writing that children should undertake.

From the evidence we gained from this section of the questionnaire, it seems that the reported priorities of these two groups of teachers for what children should know about literacy are rather different. The effective teachers seemed to focus primarily upon children's understanding that reading and writing are meaningful processes and then on the fact that to make these processes meaningful technical systems for encoding and decoding meanings are vital. For the validation teachers these priorities were more likely to be reversed.

It is important that this point is not misunderstood. It does not mean that the effective teachers discounted the importance of children learning the coding systems of literacy. We have no evidence that this was the case and, indeed, from our classroom observations of these teachers in action, they were clearly spending a lot of their teaching time focusing on these coding systems. What seems to be the case, however, is that the effective teachers strongly emphasised the functions and purposes of the codes of literacy as they taught them.

2.8 Testing teachers' content knowledge in literacy

We also collected data about teachers' knowledge of literacy through a quiz which all the teachers undertook. (A copy of the quiz will be found in Appendix 2.) We shall show that, although superficial analysis of the quiz results indicates quite low levels of performance for all teachers, the effective teachers performed better and, importantly, more quickly than the validation teachers. There are also apparently contradictory patters in the performance of the effective teachers in elements of the quiz. They demonstrated in the classroom, for example, effective knowledge of some aspects such as the use of phonemes which they could show only poorly in the quiz.

2.8.1 Section 1

The first part of the quiz asked teachers to underline in a sentence words belonging to various word classes: nouns, verbs adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions and articles. In this way we would be able to see which teachers knew these language terms and could recognise them. These basic parts of a sentence are the most likely aspects of grammar to be taught to primary aged children, so knowledge of them is likely to be important to the teachers. Our test, of course, was very brief and tested teachers' ability to recognise an example of each word class in a sentence.

Of a possible total score of 18 the median score for the effective teachers was 11.5, whereas the median for the validation sample was 2.5. The results suggests that the effective teachers were more likely to be able to identify word classes in a sentence. Detailed analysis shows that whilst all the effective teachers and validation teachers could pick out nouns and verbs correctly, and most could pick out adjectives, the rates of success for the other items were more variable.

2.8.2 Section 2

The quiz also included a word segmentation test which asked teachers to segment words into:

- syllables,
- phonemes,
- onset and rime,
- morphemes,
- sounds and
- units of meaning.

These parts of words are important in the teaching of phonological awareness, phonics and some aspects of spelling so, whilst it was not possible to test teachers' awareness of all sub-word units, these were chosen as representative. This part of the test not only allowed us to see whether the teachers knew certain technical terms for parts of a word, but also to add extra items so that we could see whether teachers were more likely to be able to segment words into sounds and meaning units, terms they are familiar with, than phonemes and morphemes, terms which they might not know.

Of a possible 22 points the results produced a median score of 9 for the effective teachers and 10 for the validation sample. However, further investigation of these results shows that a large proportion of these scores is accounted for by the ability to break down words into syllables and pick out meaningful units within words.

Few teachers were able to complete other items effectively. Less than half of each group could segment words into onsets and rimes and very few indeed could segment words into phonemes.

Although this suggests that the term 'phoneme' caused the teachers some problems, it was noticeable that they found the task difficult even when the better known term 'sound' was used. Directly before completing the test we had observed a number of the effective teachers teaching initial and final sounds and blends in ways which were clearly successful and comprehensible to the children, although we did not observe the validation teachers doing this. We shall discuss the implications of this apparent contradiction later in this chapter.

2.8.3 Section 3

A further part of the quiz asked the teachers to comment on a very partial, but traditionally used, definition of a verb, to see whether this was understood to be partial and whether teachers could expand it. This item was chosen to indicate the teachers' levels of understanding about one of the word classes they had been asked to recognise in Item 1. This item also reflected the observation that some of the validation teachers used this definition, and others like it, frequently in their classes, whereas the effective teachers were more likely to draw up functional definitions in conjunction with the children. 42.3% of the effective teachers 40% of the validation teachers recognised the limitations of the definition but only 23% of the effective teachers and 10% of the validation teachers attempted to expand it, all offering examples rather than using alternative linguistic definitions. This suggests that the effective teachers may feel more able to offer explanations, although not using formal linguistic terminology.

2.8.4 Section 4

The quiz contained two items about language variation to enable us to gain some insight into teachers' understandings about the nature and structure of standard English. We considered this important as all teachers are required to teach primary children to use and study standard English and the ability to do so may be related to their knowledge and ability to recognise it. The first part of the item asked teachers to define accent and dialect, the second to pick out the ways in which a transcribed piece of dialect speech differed from standard English.

76.9% of the effective teachers were able to name one distinguishing characteristic of accent or dialect, with only 60% of the validation sample able to do this. 88.3% of the effective teachers picked out at least one way in which the spoken passage differed from standard English, against 60% of the validation sample. However, the teachers all appeared to avoid linguistic terminology in doing so and were more likely to pick out and correct examples of the way that the dialect differed from standard English, than explain this in words.

2.8.5 Section 5

In addition to knowledge about language we hypothesised that knowledge of children's literature would be an important part of a teacher's content knowledge. To measure teachers' familiarity with literature, including not only the recommended canon of literature, but also the sorts of books commonly read by children, the Children's Author Recognition Test (CART - UK), validated by Stainthorp (1994), was used. This simple test asks teachers to distinguish the names of genuine children's authors from fouls in a list and offers a measure of teachers' familiarity with children's literature.

The results showed a mean score of 18.8 for the effective teachers and 15 for the validation sample (out of a possible 25). This suggests that the effective teachers had a greater level of awareness of children's authors than the validation sample.

2.9 Verbal comparisons of examples of children's writing and reading

In order to evaluate teachers' knowledge about the way that text, sentence and word level knowledge about literacy might be related, the teachers were asked to compare examples of children's writing and reading.

They were firstly shown two pieces of children's written work. They were asked to identify as many differences or features of the writing as they could, compare any mistakes and comment on the effectiveness of the two pieces. The pieces used were the instructions for growing cress seeds written by children and the teachers were all told the background to the task. The pieces were typed, to avoid difficulties with handwriting, but nothing else was corrected. Teachers' responses were taped and subsequently analysed. This involved listening to all the tapes and creating criteria grounded in the responses made. These criteria included the following categories of comment by the teachers.

Sub-word and word level features

- spelling
- breadth and appropriateness of vocabulary

Sentence level features

- use of sentences
- capitalisation
- tense
- imperative/declarative verbs
- temporal connectives
- use of (,) and (.)

Text level features

- layout
- sequential organisation
- generic (people, you) or personal (I, we, Mrs Lewis) participants
- presence of list of ingredients
- clarity and detail of content
- reader awareness
- fitness for purpose/genre suitability

For quantitative purposes each criterion was awarded one point and two were awarded where particular explanation or terminology was used. Examples of all these types of responses are given in Appendix 3.

The scores resulting from this procedure were very similar overall for both the effective teachers and the validation teachers, with medians of 10 (effective) and 9 (validation). However, these scores conceal some interesting differences in the groups' responses.

Comments about text features were very limited. Almost all the teachers did select one piece as more appropriate to the genre, but the effective teachers were much more likely to mention the importance of the list of ingredients in a set of instructions (51.5%) than validation teachers (10%). 39% of the effective teachers mentioned the tense of the passage, an important genre feature, compared with just 20% of the validation teachers. Very few teachers indeed (and only effective teachers) mentioned the appropriateness of the participants mentioned (*you* rather than *I* or *we*) or reader awareness.

At a word level, the effective teachers were also much less likely to mention the single spelling mistake (55.4%) where all the validation sample did so. 10% of the effective teachers mentioned appropriate vocabulary choices, but none of the validation sample did this.

At a sentence level almost all the teachers (93% effective, 100% validation) mentioned the use of capital letters and approximately 20% of both groups specifically mentioned the use of full stops, although only 11% of the effective teachers, and none of the validation teachers, highlighted the use of commas. Of both teacher groups 80% mentioned sentence structure in general. However, the ways they did this raises some important questions about their knowledge of sentence structure. A large proportion of the validation teachers selected the sentences in the less effective piece of writing as "better" because they used capital letters properly and were longer, even though they were arguably less effective in the piece of writing and less appropriate to the genre, which most teachers identified correctly. Many of these teachers also identified the first sentence of one piece as "incorrect" because

it used a capital letter incorrectly and included commas. In fact, this was the most sophisticated example of punctuation in the two pieces, correctly and appropriately using commas to punctuate a list. One possible explanation of this is that these teachers were too reliant upon a traditional (incomplete) definition of a sentence as "something that starts with a capital letter and ends with a full stop"

The order in which most of the two groups of teachers supplied criteria and observations was also very different. The effective teachers were more likely to mention first of all text level features such as content and detail, genre, list of ingredients etc., and then to list some of the sentence and word level features. Most of the teachers in the validation sample mentioned these features in the opposite order. When asked which was the most effective piece of writing for the purpose, all of the effective teachers selected the correct piece, whereas one of the validation teachers chose the narrative piece and four more initially chose this and later changed their minds as they examined the pieces more carefully.

Although the final scores are very close for the two groups, they did approach the task in different ways. These results suggest that, given plenty of time to do the task and continuous prompting from an interviewer, teachers could generate a fairly complete list of criteria for comparing two pieces of instruction writing. However, in a busy classroom it is unlikely that the teachers would spend anywhere near this length of time on passages like this, in which case the priority teachers gave to the various criteria could be very important. In the first 3-5 minutes of analysis of these writing passages the two groups identified different criteria and made different judgements about the passages. There is likely to be a difference between teachers' *competence* in identifying and responding to language features and their *performance* under realistic conditions. In classroom conditions, with its pressing demands upon teachers' time and attention, the criteria for judging children's writing they habitually use are likely to be those which first come to their minds. If this is so, then children in the classes of teachers like those in our validation sample will be getting a quite different picture of what counts as important in writing from those with teachers like our effective teachers of literacy.

The teachers were also asked to look at two examples of children's reading to allow us to evaluate teachers' knowledge of children's cue use and comprehension strategies as well as the teachers' knowledge of important features of texts for reading. Two transcriptions of children's attempts to read and retell a version of "The Emperor's New Clothes" were used. These were shown to the teachers and they were asked to compare the readings, the mistakes and the features of the retellings. Their accounts were analysed by generating a list of criteria used by the teachers which included the following:

Cue use and strategies
- pausing behaviour and reading fluency
- initial sound cues
- context and picture cues
- syntactic cues
- self correction

Comprehension
- sequence of events in retelling
- relative importance of events
- degree of detail in the retelling
- predicts the story
- enjoys humour
- uses vocabulary from the reading passage in retelling
- confidence/experience
- fluency of retelling

These criteria were awarded one point if simply referred to and two when the response was more elaborated or included appropriate terminology. Examples of all the criteria are included in Appendix 3.

The results show the effective teachers scored rather better than the validation sample with a median score of 14.5 against 8.5. These differences in results are largely accounted for by a small number of criteria. The effective teachers were much more likely to comment in detail on the use of graphic and phonic cues at the level of initial sounds and blends. The validation teachers were just as likely to mention sounds but did so in a more general way using expressions like "she's OK at sounds" rather than identifying specific evidence and making inferences about particular phonic capabilities. The effective teachers were less likely to comment on pausing behaviour but those effective teachers who did this went on to infer what the child might be doing, for instance "it seems, from the pauses, that she's trying to read word by word, rather than looking at larger units as well". Conversely, half of the validation teachers simply said "she's paused more"

In a similar way, all the validation teachers mentioned the use of meaning cues, whereas only 84.6% of the effective teachers did so. However, 30% of the validation teachers simply made statements such as, "his reading makes sense", whereas only 11% of the effective teachers mentioned context cues in this way, with 73% pointing out the cues used and inferring the child's reading strategies from the evidence.

In considering the children's comprehension of the passages both the effective and validation teachers mentioned most frequently the level of detail given and the child's ability to predict the story. More of the effective teachers (40% as opposed to 10% of the validation group) identified items of vocabulary from the passage which the children had used in their retelling, with 30% of the effective teachers using this evidence to make further inferences about the child's understanding. None of the validation teachers did this .The validation teachers commented more on the fluency of the retelling (30% of validation teachers and 7% of effective teachers) and the pauses in the reading, but did not elaborate or suggest reasons for these phenomena. Half of the effective teachers mentioned the children's enjoyment of the story whereas only 30 % of the validation teachers did this. In addition 30% of the effective teachers used evidence of this to infer the readers' level of experience of story. It was notable, also, that most of the validation teachers (70%) chose to look at the reading and retellings separately, whereas 73.1% of the effective teachers used both the retellings and readings together and made points which drew on evidence from both sources.

The results of the analysis of the reading passages suggest that whilst both the effective and validation teachers were quite thorough in their evaluation of these pieces of reading, the effective teachers were likely to use more criteria and make more inferences about the children's strategies and understanding.

The effective teachers, and a few of the validation teachers, were much more able to perform well on these tasks, which demanded generation of criteria, analysis of mistakes and inference about children's performance, than on the literacy quiz, which lacked context. The effective teachers, in particular, made many more inferences about the children's performances on the passages and were more precise in their discussion of the evidence they used. The effective teachers also asked questions about related aspects of the children's reading and writing in different contexts and were much more likely to suggest experiences and teaching which they thought these children would find beneficial. This supports the evidence of the questionnaires, observations and interviews, from which the effective teachers appeared to use a wider range of diagnostic assessment strategies, keep careful records and were more likely to plan sessions carefully tailored to the needs of their children. A picture of most of the effective teachers as more diagnostic in their use of children's performance and more concerned with the children's learning emerges from this data.

The effective teacher's ability to examine the reading and writing passages, and to make connections between the language levels involved may be an indicator of how they know about language. They clearly did have an in depth knowledge of the text, sentence and word levels of language but were much more likely to represent this knowledge in terms of what children could do. They were generally less able to show knowledge about language in the abstract sense of recognising particular forms such as phonemes or morphemes. Content knowledge for these teachers appeared to be highly embedded in their teaching of this knowledge.

2.10 Teachers' knowledge of the curriculum

The content of the responses to the questionnaire indicated very clearly that both the validation teachers and the effective teachers of literacy were familiar with the content and form of the National Curriculum requirements for English in relation to reading and writing at KS1 and KS2. Responses to questions about what children need to know included words used in the National Curriculum as well as whole sentences taken directly from the National Curriculum documents. Teachers also explicitly referred to these documents. This finding was checked against the observations made by researchers and the plans which the teachers in the sub-samples showed to researchers. We are confident that the evidence of the project confirms that both the validation teachers and effective teachers of literacy were familiar with the requirements of the National Curriculum for English for reading and writing.

2.11 The content of literacy lessons

In terms of content, the effective teachers' lessons which we observed showed a number of consistent features which strongly suggest an underpinning content knowledge.

The effective teachers were focused in their aims for the lessons observed. Although teachers' plans were not examined in detail, all were able to identify the focus and aims of a lesson to the interviewers and this coincided with observers' accounts of that lesson. This was not always the case for the validation sample teachers. In addition, the effective teachers tended to identified the literacy focus of the lesson *to* the class of children, usually more than once during a lesson. The way they did this was often by discussion with the class about *why* a particular piece of literacy knowledge, or a particular reading or writing skill was useful. This sort of discussion was much less common in the lessons of the validation group.

A brief example of this feature is the way Mrs J began her introduction to the class.

> *"Right, today, we are going to look at one of the features of The Demon Headmaster which you might not have noticed. That's the dialogue. What is dialogue. Can someone find some in the book?"* (writes the word 'dialogue' on the board and takes answers and examples from three children)
>
> *"The characters speaking to each other. It's one of the things that makes a character interesting and it is really important that we, the readers, understand exactly what the characters do say to each other. So we are going to see how that speech is set out in the book, so that the readers know who is speaking and how they are speaking".*

After discussing the details of the conventions of dialogue Mrs J again reinforced this point in introducing the task to the children.

> *"I want you to be able write out dialogue so that you can make your characters this interesting. You need to use this way of setting out speech to do this, so I am getting you all to write a dialogue today to practice these points. I want you to write a dialogue between two characters from the book, setting it out so that a reader can easily see who is speaking. What are you going to use to set this out?* (writes down the words 'capitals', 'commas', 'inverted commas', 'new lines' on the board as the children call them out).

At the end of the session Mrs J went over the main points of setting out direct speech and concluded with the words:

> *"OK, now we've practised setting out dialogue with characters you know from the book, we'll have to go on and write some for the characters we make up. And I want you to remember how to set out the speech so that you can write clear, interesting dialogue. So that a reader can understand easily. Good dialogue that's easy to read brings a character alive. It's vital to a good plot - one of you could be the next Gillian Cross."*

Not only was Mrs J teaching her class about a specific punctuation rule, she was also signalling to them why it was important and what purpose it served. She was helping them make a connection between word level and text level knowledge and her teaching clearly drew upon her own knowledge of the features she was teaching.

The literacy focus of a lesson was not only discussed with the children, but usually set in a context of a whole text or learning aim for the children. KS1 children were, for instance, repeatedly asked to suggest their own examples of the use of particular letter sounds. At KS2, teachers were more likely to use particular audiences or purposes for types of writing as the context of a literacy aim such as using adjectives or comprehension strategies. In both situations teachers emphasised the function of literacy and the connections with ongoing, completed or future literacy activities. The effective teachers did not simply present a literacy point without context, whereas this happened repeatedly in the lessons of validation teachers. A lesson about setting out dialogue by one of the validation teachers, for instance, included reference to "the rules for setting out direct speech" and negotiated these rules with the children. However, no mention was made of why direct speech was set out like this. This is in contrast to the attention given to function seen in the extract from Mrs J's lesson above.

The difference here between these two groups of teachers suggests a difference in their content knowledge in literacy, but not necessarily a difference in the extent of this knowledge. Rather the distinction lies in the ways this knowledge is represented. The effective teachers appeared more able to see connections between the content they knew about, particularly between content at the textual and sentence/word levels. They were thus able to set items of sentence/word level content into a whole text context and to ensure that these connections were made apparent to their pupils. This knowledge enabled them to be less dependent on published materials in their teaching and to work with pupils' own understanding, confident in the knowledge that they would be able to relate this readily to the goals for a particular lesson.

These connections tended not to be made by the validation teachers which suggests their knowledge was internally represented as discrete items of content. Because of this discreteness they had much less scope for demonstrating at a deeper level the workings of the English language, lacking the knowledge to see opportunities for pointing out examples as they occurred in their own or their pupils' language use.

Of some relevance to the issue of content focus are the teachers' reasons for choosing to teach particular literacy content at a particular time. When we asked the teachers why they had chosen to cover content in a particular lesson, the categories of answers received included:

1. because it was planned (in which case we probed further)
2. because of identified children's literacy needs in developmental terms
3. because of a progression in terms of planning literacy content
4. because of a topic link.

The effective teachers generally described reasons for choosing particular content in greater detail than the validation teachers. This may reflect greater expertise in the subject and also a greater depth of content knowledge.

The effective teachers used reasons 2 and 3 consistently. Where they mentioned planning or their scheme of work as the reason for choosing the lesson content we asked why it was like that and they gave us answers which were similar to categories two and three. Many of the effective teachers gave detailed accounts of what particular children could do and what the next step in their learning was felt to be. They seemed to have a clear idea of developmental sequences involved in learning the aspects of literacy discussed.

> *"Well, that's what they need to do in their writing now. They've seen me writing for them and they have done short items of composing. We have done oral stories and they have heard plenty of stories. I know they can use the sounds to get a good number of words. So its time for a little more challenging task. Pulling it all together in a story for someone else. I mean, I'm confident they can do it because I have reviewed the skills they need. Its just the job they*

need now. They will be really pleased with it too when its finished, don't underestimate that sense of achievement. It really helps them learn."

"Well I know they're ready for that, those children."
"How do you know?"
"I mean I know what they've done of course and how they did it. I know what sounds they know and who has got concepts like 'words' and so on. I test them regularly on sight vocabulary. I know what words they know. If you noticed the three who have sentence makers, they have 25-30 words they know by sight in the sentence makers. The others know 6-9 words by sight."

The effective teachers also told us that they had selected items of content in terms of its place in a sequence of content.

"Well, it's because of the preliminary work I've done. I have been building this up. I've shown them how to do word webs, how to do a brainstorm, but everything in the past has been quite teacher directed and teacher led. Now I feel they are able to take on more responsibility for their own work, so this task gets them to do that."

"We're doing a study on poems. We're looking at different poems, looking at the way poems are structures, looking at the different devices poets use. The last session was on writing of poems and the structure. We talked about how poems are structured and how they are different from narrative writing. This follows on from that and leads on to later poems work."

"We are learning about sounds and words as they are getting on to writing more themselves. So we have done initial sounds and initial two sounds, which most of them can cope with. There's a small group who aren't ready for this so I am doing ending sounds. We've done - og words - we did that last week and the week before and we're onto -at words. I introduced those this morning on the sheet on the easel, all the words ending in -at they could come up with and now we're putting them into sentences to see what you can do with these words."

Where the effective teachers referred to the place of the content in terms of the school, county or published scheme of work they used either the needs of the children or the progression of literacy content as justification of this structure.

"Well as part of our scheme of work we have a story writing focus for our term for this Y6. We've identified the different aspects of story writing we want to teach and we have got a planning sheet where we have mapped out what we want the very able, less able and capable to learn. It seemed a good time in the story to do this because we have been reading the book for a couple of weeks, they are thoroughly enjoying it and it came to an obvious point for them to do some of their own work on this. So it brings together the things they have been doing in the last four or five weeks."

The validation teachers explained their choice of content much more briefly than the effective teachers of literacy. They used all the reasons mentioned above but were much more likely to use categories one and four. They chose content to fit in with the scheme of work or planning and, when asked, did not explain why the work was planned in this way. They pointed out that the English co-ordinator, year team or colleague had made these decision either with or without their participation, but did not say why. Three of the teachers said they chose work to reflect the topic link, which was not a literacy theme, so that the work was chosen for a non-literacy reason. Two validation teachers also said they had chosen this content as preparation for SATs. The very different use of reasons for choice reflects the balance of expertise of these teachers. They were maths co-ordinators and appeared much less able to discuss children's needs or literacy progression than the effective teachers of literacy.

Reference to a developmental sequence in children's learning of literacy suggests a fairly secure knowledge of what children are learning. The fact that the effective teachers of literacy were able to do this consistently again implies an extensive knowledge base in literacy. Again it was evident,

however, that the content knowledge these teachers referred to was always firmly embedded in their analysis of what their children could do and should now be doing.

2.12 Linguistic terminology

During the classroom observations we highlighted the ways teachers discussed literacy with their children and made careful note of the linguistic terminology used in presenting literacy lessons. The variety of terminology used was clearly circumscribed and included the following terms:

- Word level: alphabet, alphabetical order, rhyme, definition, beginning sound, middle sound, end sound, vowel, word, letter, sound, blend, magic *e*, homophone, synonym, digraph, prefix, spelling string.
- Sentence level: capital letter, full stop, sentence, speech mark, inverted comma, noun, thing word, adjective, describing word, contraction, apostrophe, word order, dialogue, conversation, apostrophe, question mark.
- Text level: predict, picture, caption, label, paragraph, planning, drafting, revising (plan, draft, revision), story, instructions, report, headings, ending, opening, character, setting, alliteration, ingredients, list, fiction, non-fiction, layout, address, salutation, skimming, scanning, highlight, key word, meaning, expression, image, simile.
- Range of text types: poem, author, illustrator, paperback and hardback, nursery rhyme, cover, ISBN, picture, script, play, recipe, dictionary, appreciate, comparison.

Although the effective teachers did not appear to use a wider variety of terms about language than the validation sample in an individual lesson, they did use them differently. The effective teachers not only defined terms that they used but offered more examples of the item. They often collected examples and discussed the function of the word before offering a definition. They chose a variety of examples which illustrated the definition, rather than repeating formulaic definitions (such as "a verb is a doing word") and asked children to supply examples of their own. The effective teachers were also observed to ask the children to explain terms to them at a number of points in the session, whereas the teachers in the validation sample did not do this in most cases. It appeared that the effective teachers had a greater depth of knowledge than the validation teachers and were able to use a variety of representations of particular ideas.

In addition to using standard linguistic terminology the effective teachers were observed to pick out and discuss elements of language, eliciting functional definitions of word types, parts of words or sentence organisation, without using a standard linguistic definition. For instance, a teacher introducing the idea of descriptive writing as part of a narrative opening drew up a list of the nouns and adjectives in the example passage. These were sorted by the children in terms of their function, without using the label noun or adjective.

2.13 An interpretation of teachers' subject knowledge in literacy.

In this chapter we have presented details about our findings about teachers' content knowledge in literacy. We have been concerned to point out the complexity of this issue. As far as we know, this is the first research study to attempt such an exploration of literacy subject knowledge and, perhaps unsurprisingly, our findings do not altogether support the hypotheses we generated in this area. In particular, we failed to find any real separation in effective teachers between content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge in literacy. It seems to us that the effective teachers of literacy 'know' their subject in quite a special way which itself has many implications for initial training and continuing professional development.

The main findings of our research into teachers' subject knowledge of literacy suggest several important conclusions.

- All the teachers we worked with knew the requirements of the National Curriculum well and could describe what they were doing in terms of these.

- They all also recognised the different literacy teaching needs of KS1 and KS2 children.

- There were differences between the validation teachers and the effective teachers in their specifications of what children needed to know about reading and writing. Whilst the effective teachers taught the codes of language (phonics, spelling, grammar, etc.) just as much as their validation colleagues, in general they placed more emphasis on children's recognition of the purposes and functions of reading and writing and on the codes as tools to enable these processes. The validation teachers were more likely to emphasise technical knowledge about the codes of literacy than their purpose and to stress the importance of technical knowledge for its own sake rather than an ability to use it accurately and effectively.

- All the teachers had limited success at recognising some types of words in a sentence and some sub-word units out of context. The effective teachers were more likely to be able to pick out word types such as adjectives, adverbs etc. but less able to identify such units as phonemes, onsets and rimes and morphemes. Using more everyday terminology for these units still did not ensure total success for the teachers in recognising them. This casts doubt on the effective teachers' abstract knowledge of linguistic concepts such as phoneme. (What our data cannot show, of course, is how much more effective the effective teachers might have been if their knowledge of linguistic concepts had been more extensive and more explicit.)

- Despite this apparent lack of knowledge, these teachers were observed to use some of it in their teaching, particularly that connected with phonics. Our interpretation of this contradiction is that the effective teachers knew the material they were teaching in a particular way. It did not seem to be the case that they knew a body of knowledge (content) and then selected appropriate ways to represent it to their children (pedagogy). Rather, they appeared to know the material in the way they taught it to the children, which was usually as material which helped these children read and write. The knowledge base of these teachers thus *was* their pedagogical content knowledge. This is rather a different concept of pedagogical content knowledge from that of Shulman (1987), as described earlier, for whom this refers to knowledge of ways of transforming content in order to represent it for others. Our interpretation of what we have observed is that the effective teachers did not transform their knowledge in this way. In fact, at the time we studied them, they appeared only to know their material by how they represented it for their children. They may, of course, once have known this material differently. But, through experience of teaching it, their knowledge seemed to have become totally embedded in their pedagogical practices.

- When examining and judging samples of children's reading and writing, all the teachers were able to generate criteria and to analyse mistakes, but the way the two groups approached the task was different. The effective teachers were more highly diagnostic in the ways they approached the task and were more obviously able to generate sustainable explanations as to why children read or wrote as they did. In examining the pieces of writing, although the two groups mentioned similar features eventually, the effective teachers were quicker to focus on possible underlying causes of a child's writing behaviour. The validation sample required lots of prompting and time to reach an equivalent point. It is likely that, in a busy classroom context, they would not routinely make the same level of judgements made by the effective teachers. This suggests a further aspect of subject knowledge in which the effective teachers of literacy performed better; the knowledge of children and the ways they exhibit skills or skill problems in literacy.

- We also found evidence from observations of a limited range of linguistic terminology being used by teachers. It appeared that the way the two groups of teachers used linguistic terminology was different. The validation teachers were likely to teach definitions of the terms they used whereas the effective teachers tended to begin with language functions and use these within a clear text setting before deriving a definition, which might well be arrived at in discussion with the children. Children in the classes of these teachers, while acquiring the necessary knowledge, were much more heavily involved in problem-solving and theorising about language for themselves rather than only being given 'facts' to learn.

Chapter 3

Teachers' beliefs about literacy teaching

3.1 Introduction

Studies of teacher beliefs (e.g. Munby, 1984, Nespor, 1987, Richardson, 1994) suggest that the extent to which teachers adopt new instructional practices in their classrooms relates closely to the degree of alignment between their personal beliefs and the assumptions underlying particular innovatory teaching programmes or methods. Such studies have led to a strong feeling that an understanding of teachers' beliefs is important in understanding teachers' current classroom practices and in designing professional development programmes which seek to change those practices. Harste & Burke (1977) point out, however, that examining implicit beliefs is fraught with problems. If beliefs are implicit they may not be articulated, and as beliefs do not necessarily transfer into practice, they cannot be inferred directly from practice. These authors did argue, however, that their research was suggesting that "despite atheoretical statements, teachers are theoretical in their instructional approach" (p 32).

Although teachers' beliefs are thought to be important in effective teaching the existing literature on teaching is weak in terms of evidence about the ways beliefs link to practice, especially in the teaching of literacy. We deliberately set out to investigate this link and our working hypothesis was that the effective teachers of literacy would have developed a coherent set of beliefs about the nature and the learning of literacy which played a guiding role in their selection of teaching approaches. Thus our line of inquiry focused on the consistency between teachers' beliefs about literacy teaching, the teaching activities they said they valued, and those activities they actually used.

Our findings, in summary, indicate that, in reporting their views about the teaching of reading and writing, the effective teachers of literacy were much more likely than teachers in the validation sample to place a high priority on purpose, communication and composition. They also emphasised the importance of connecting word level, sentence level and text level aspects of reading and writing in this construction. The effective teachers generally identified teaching activities that were consistent with their stated beliefs about the teaching of literacy. From our observations of the ways they translated their beliefs into classroom practice it was clear that these teachers also made explicit to their pupils the connections between word, sentence and text level aspects.

We used two main approaches in order to investigate teachers' beliefs about the teaching of literacy. Firstly, as part of the questionnaire administered to both the effective teacher sample and the validation sample, teachers were asked to complete an orientation profile to determine their reported beliefs. We also observed the practice of a number of teachers in both samples, interviewed them about this practice and asked them to complete an attitude scale about literacy learning. Our aim was thus to check reported beliefs against the reality of classroom action to give a more valid account of the beliefs of these teachers.

3.2 Orientations towards the teaching of literacy - reported beliefs

Our hypothesis was that the more effective teachers would have more fully developed practical theories about teaching literacy which would govern their actions in classrooms at a strategic level. Such practical theories or beliefs are difficult to research because they operate implicitly and create tendencies to act in certain ways rather than direct certainties about specific actions.

We found the concept of orientation useful as a way of thinking about teachers' beliefs or theories. It helped us to consider both the different degrees to which teachers were drawn to specific ideas and the extent to which such patterns of belief or theory were consistent both internally and with teachers' statements about their teaching strategies and their work in classrooms.

We used and adapted a model of orientation originally developed by Deford (1985) to try to identify the major patterns in orientation. Deford's model provides a series of statements which can be used to analyse the relative emphasis which teachers give to different beliefs about teaching reading. In adapting Deford's model we:

- reduced the number of orientations,
- re-wrote them to be less American in tone,
- added a parallel set of statements about teaching strategies and about writing.

The broad patterns of orientation we worked with we refer to as:

For Reading	*For Writing*
• a phonics orientation	• a presentation orientation
• a word orientation	• a process orientation
• a meaning or communication orientation	• a forms/purpose orientation

There was no expectation that these orientations would be mutually exclusive.

In using the orientations within the questionnaire we hoped to be able to discern:

- distinctive broad patterns of emphasis between groups of teachers,
- the extent to which teachers' statements about teaching strategies were consistent with their beliefs,
- the extent to which teachers demonstrated coherent patterns within their stated beliefs,
- the extent to which teachers stated beliefs were consistent with what they actually did in classrooms.

In describing our findings we need to describe the building blocks of our analysis step by step but the significance of each element is only clear when the whole picture is assembled. It is therefore crucial not to take individual elements out of context. For example, although the teachers whose pupils made good learning gains, the effective teachers, did not express a strong orientation towards phonics, emphasising instead the importance of communicating and composing meaning, they did in fact teach phonics systematically. Their orientation towards communication led them to approach phonics as an important means to an end rather than as an end in itself.

3.3 Responses to attitude statements

There were some significant differences in the beliefs about literacy held by the effective teachers of literacy and by the validation sample teachers. These can be summarised as:

- The effective teachers were more likely than the validation teachers to take a communication-led orientation to the teaching of reading. They tended to give emphasis to a stated belief that the meaning of texts should be stressed in early reading and that texts should be used as the principal reading material, rather than isolated sentences, words etc. presented out of context.
- Although the effective teachers of literacy agreed with statements about the importance of spelling and letter sounds, they gave less emphasis than the validation group to the importance of children's use of sound-symbol correspondences in decoding new words. They emphasised the importance of communication and saw the teaching of sound-symbol correspondences as means to an end.
- Although both groups tended to disagree that young readers should be introduced to new words before meeting them in context in a book, the validation teachers were more likely to agree that repetition of words was important in early reading, suggesting a greater emphasis on the teaching of whole words.
- The effective teachers of literacy generally disagreed with giving priority to presentation in the teaching of writing. The validation group tended to be neutral about this.

These differences were much more pronounced in beliefs about the teaching of reading than about the teaching of writing, but it seems that, in general, the effective teachers felt more strongly that in literacy teaching composition and communication were prime goals whereas teaching phonics and words were important means to that end. Although the validation teachers did not reject

communication and composition as a goal in literacy, they were more inclined to place prime emphasis on word level aspects of literacy which they saw as ends in themselves.

Our analysis also suggests that the effective teachers of literacy had rather more coherent belief systems about the teaching of literacy than did the teachers in the validation sample. They were less inclined to be contradictory in the statements they said they supported. A full presentation of the evidence underpinning these conclusions is given in Appendix 3.

3.4 Statements about attitudes to teaching strategies

Teachers' responses to statements about teaching activities showed a similar pattern to responses to attitude statements about literacy teaching. In teaching reading, the effective teachers of literacy rated favourably teaching activities that focus upon communication and composition. They were less likely than the validation teachers to rate favourably activities such as "Children completing phonic worksheets and exercises" and "Using flashcards to teach children to read words by sight", activities which, while part of a balanced reading programme, do not in themselves focus upon the understanding of text.

The effective teachers were very positive about the activity, "Teaching letter sounds as a way of helping children build up words". This raises the interesting question of how they planned their teaching of letter sounds to make the learning meaningful for children. Both groups were consistent in their responses to the two teaching strategies selected as representative of particular theoretical orientations.

In reporting upon the teaching of writing, the effective teachers of literacy, consistent with their tendency to emphasise other issues over presentation, were less likely to rate favourably the teaching of spelling through spelling lists and more likely to value children helping each other revise their writing. As will be seen from the later analysis of actual, as opposed to reported, teaching activities, the effective teachers did teach spelling but in different ways and in different settings.

There was, in general, less to distinguish between the two groups of teachers in their reported attitudes towards writing teaching activities although the effective teachers of literacy did show a greater degree of consistency between their ratings of teaching activities and their attitudes towards the theoretical orientations these activities were chosen to represent. Again, the evidence on which these conclusions are based is given in Appendix 3.

3.5 Coherence in stated beliefs about literacy teaching

One of the hypotheses of the research was that the effective teachers of literacy would show a greater coherence in their beliefs about literacy teaching. Accordingly we explored the match between the theoretical orientations to literacy teaching held by both the effective teachers and the validation teachers and their feelings about teaching activities which matched these orientations. We felt that coherent beliefs would be indicated through strength of agreement between theoretical orientations and attitudes to activities. The results of this analysis (given in full in Appendix 3) suggest that the effective teachers of literacy were more likely to show coherence between their beliefs about the teaching of literacy and about approaches to its teaching. This match between beliefs about literacy and attitudes towards teaching approaches suggests that these teachers have belief systems about literacy that influence their selection of approaches to teaching.

Although these results demonstrate that what the effective teachers of literacy appear to believe about literacy matches with what they say they feel about particular kinds of teaching activities, it is also important to consider how this relates to what these teachers actually do in their classrooms.

3.6 Beliefs and action - observations and interviews

Two sub-samples of teachers, as explained elsewhere, were twice observed teaching literacy and were subsequently interviewed about this teaching. The teachers observed were asked to teach "a normal

literacy session" and the strategies, techniques and content of the lessons seen reflected the full range of activities suggested by the questionnaire results.

A number of issues about teacher's beliefs about literacy and its teaching were identified from the questionnaire data for further exploration during the lesson observations and interviews.

1. How did the effective teachers' strong orientation towards meaning centred statements about literacy teaching at the level of beliefs translate into classroom practice?

2. How did the effective teachers of literacy marry the emphasis they placed, in the belief statements, on breaking down words as an important teaching strategy with their beliefs about phonics and the importance of focusing explicitly upon meaning?

3. How did the effective teachers teach letter sounds given their disinclination to use phonic worksheets?

4. Given the effective teachers emphasis upon confidence in writing in the early stages, how did they try to ensure well presented and accurate writing?

5. Was there any coherence between what the teachers reported themselves as doing in the questionnaires and what they actually did in practice? The gap between self-report and action is a very familiar phenomenon noted in a number of social science research areas.

We will report our findings regarding these questions under several headings.

3.7 Making connections: levels of language study

The observed teaching of the effective teachers of literacy reflected their reported beliefs in the importance of communication and composition. They were also quite clearly systematically teaching elements of language such as sentence features and the ways words were constructed, for example, phonologically. The ways in which they brought together these levels of language study were significant, and rather different to the approaches generally used by the validation teachers.

A noticeable feature of the teaching of the effective teachers was the very wide range of texts used in their sessions. These were chosen by the teachers to be suitable for the literacy purposes of their lessons. They included class novels, stories which illustrated particular narrative features and conventions of writing, information books with particular book conventions and good quality literature matched to the children's levels of individual and group reading ability.

The effective teachers of literacy chose to teach features of language, such as sound patterns or word functions in the context of larger units of texts and to emphasise the function of a particular element of language. In doing this, they explicitly made connections for their pupils between language elements at the text, sentence and word levels.

They also tended to set fewer published exercises than the teachers in the validation sample, although there was clear evidence that they did use exercises. There were, however, several distinctive features about the ways in which these were used. In particular it seemed from our observations that the effective teachers of literacy always ensured that they gave pupils clear instructions about the use of the exercise. Teachers made it clear to pupils what the point of an exercise was, how they should tackle it and what they should expect to learn from it. This kind of clarity was not usually evident in the lessons of the validation teachers.

The issue of meaning was particularly important in relation to grammar and punctuation lessons. The effective teachers of literacy were much more likely to spend time discussing the use of a grammatical structure and defining it by illustrating its role in a sentence. They used grammar to describe language. The children in their classes were often asked to deduce grammatical rules from presented extracts of language, often taken from shared texts. The teacher contributed to ensure their ideas were sensible but the children in lessons like this were very heavily involved in making sense of the

language rules they were learning. The validation teachers, on the other hand, were much more likely to use grammar to prescribe rules for writing. Rules were presented to children as things they had to follow but there was little attempt to get them to understand why. These practices seem to us to represent very different concepts of the nature and function of sentence grammar.

What was distinctive, therefore, about the effective teachers' work was the deliberate ways in which they linked work on sentences and/or words to whole texts. Language study for their pupils was embedded in experience of texts so the teachers could point out connections between language levels in ways that made it more likely that the pupils would themselves see these connections.

3.8 The teaching of phonics

From the questionnaire it appeared that the effective teachers of literacy were less positive about a phonic orientation to teaching reading than the validation sample, agreeing that breaking down words to sounds was a useful reading strategy, but not that it was the most important strategy. We looked more closely at the practice of both groups in this area and found important differences in the ways in which each saw the purpose of phonics and taught them to their children.

Although the effective teachers did not say that phonics was their priority in teaching reading, there was plenty of evidence that they were teaching sound-symbol correspondences in a planned, systematic way. Of the 26 effective teachers' sessions observed in the second round of observations, 10 had a planned phonics component. In all these cases the teachers, when asked about the content of the lesson, identified sound recognition as one of their teaching aims. This included the study of particular letter sounds, blends and digraphs by the whole class each week, although the classes were often organised so that different groups did the tasks at different times. This resulted in some classes discussing a particular sound several times in class introductions.

The phonics sessions we observed included whole class introductions where the teacher picked out the chosen sound from a sentence or text. The teachers wrote a sound on boards or flip charts and collected words that featured that sound. They drew attention to the letters involved in the sounds, including letter names, position of these letters in the alphabet, and letter formation. Teachers referred to other activities such as sound tables and television programmes, which they used to feature the sound and place it firmly in a classroom context. A great deal of emphasis was placed on when the sound in question would be encountered. Despite the questionnaire finding that effective teachers were less likely to use phonic worksheets, we observed five teachers setting worksheets as follow up activities to a class discussion session. Some of these were related to the big books the teacher had been using. Three examples had been made by the teacher, the others came from major reading schemes. One teacher discussed this with us:

> *"I use the sheets, from another scheme, not ours actually, but they are better than the ones in ours. It's the way they use the stories. I use them as follow up. A check. And to be honest, it does keep them busy while I work with the others.*

Another six effective teacher lessons we observed had a sound identification component, including reference to initial sounds in big books read for other purposes, discussion of the sounds of words used in handwriting practice and references to sound rules in spellings used for writing. These were not, however, mentioned by teachers as specific teaching aims.

In addition to sound and letter study we observed four sessions which included activities with emphasis on rhymes. The teachers who taught these sessions reported rhyme recognition as one of their aims and the sessions included the use of nursery rhymes and nonsense poems. All started with a whole class introduction, including repeating poems, rhymes and jingles in unison and picking out the rhymes. The teachers asked children to invent other rhymes and wrote up rhyming words to look at the letters used.

We observed three sessions which involved individual children reading with teachers and two where classroom assistants read with children. In all of these cases the teachers were observed to point out or

ask children to use initial sounds to help word attack, as well as using other prompts like questions about the story and asking the child to read past the word then come back to try to read it.

Although our effective teachers were addressing phonics systematically and made real efforts to plan and monitor it in their routine teaching of reading, they did not show an orientation towards phonics in their beliefs. It was apparently seen as a necessary, but not a sufficient, part of the teaching of reading: as a means to an end rather than as a goal in its own right.

During interviews the teachers indicated that they had clear systems for teaching phonics, although these differed from school to school. Some linked the order of phonics teaching to handwriting, others to a progression of "difficulty" of sounds, or perceived developmental sequence and still others to the pattern set by television programmes or schemes.

> *"We are learning about sounds and words as they are getting on to writing more themselves. So we have done initial sounds and initial two sounds, which most of them can cope with. There's a small group who aren't ready for these so I am doing ending sounds. We've done - og words - we did that last week and the week before and we're onto -at words. I introduced those this morning on the sheet on the easel, all the words ending in -at they could come up with and now we're putting them into sentences to see what you can do with these words."*

> *"I've known since the start of term that lots of those children know those sounds, but I want to consolidate the concept of letter sound and use the sounds they know to go on to find other words with those sounds."*

The lessons emphasised the role of sounds in reading and writing and placed emphasis upon children's developing understanding of how the sound system of language could be used to offer access to stories, messages and other texts.

By contrast, the lessons of the validation teachers we observed which had a phonic element tended to be managed quite differently. Phonics worksheets were heavily used but little attempt was made to help children apply the phonic blends they were learning to the reading of continuous texts. When questioned about their selection of the lesson content, these teachers were much more likely to reply that this was decided for them, usually citing a scheme of work agreed by the school as their rationale for a teaching order. We observed very little use of big books or nursery rhymes as a vehicle for introducing and discussing sounds.

3.9 The teaching of writing

The effective teachers also gave little emphasis to a presentation orientation towards writing. They strongly agreed that confidence in writing was more important than accuracy in the early stages of writing, and did not agree with the validation teachers that the use of tests of published spelling lists was helpful. Again close examination of how such beliefs are manifested in practice reveals a more complex picture.

Our observations suggest that the effective teachers were much more likely than the validation sample to prioritise other aspects of writing than presentation and more likely to separate the presentation aspects from composition in their teaching. However, they did do handwriting and spelling work at other times. The validation teachers were more likely to include both composition and presentation as teaching aims for a single session. This suggests rather more clarity of teaching aims in the effective teachers and less risk of these aims being confused by children trying to focus on too much at once.

Of the effective teachers' lessons observed, 16 included writing tasks where the emphasis was placed on aspects of writing such as content (ideas), structure (of letters, stories, reports), text features such as paragraphs and chronological order, audience awareness (usually for letters), choice of words, planning, drafting and editing, alliteration, précis, rhyme and images. The teachers were clear that these aspects of the sessions were the main teaching content and that this was what they wanted the children to learn. All these lessons did, nevertheless, contain some references to the presentation and spelling of writing. In some the teachers pointed out that presentation and spelling were not important

criteria in this particular lesson and would be dealt with later. However, the children did have a range of strategies for spelling words and these were used as a matter of routine. Most of the teachers also emphasised at some point the use of sentences, capital letters and full stops.

We also observed 10 sessions where one or more activities had a specific presentation or spelling focus that the teacher identified as a learning outcome for the session. These activities included structured handwriting practice, spelling rules practice (magic *e*, for instance, or dropping -e to add ing) and copying out final drafts of writing for presentation purposes. We saw two spelling tests being given. One of these used words with a common visual spelling pattern and the other was individual to each child, tested by another, of words spelt incorrectly the previous week. We did not see published spelling lists used in the classes of effective teachers.

3.10 Summary

In summarising the project's findings concerning teachers' beliefs about the teaching and learning of literacy, several points stand out as important.

- The effective teachers of literacy tended to place a high value upon communication and composition in their views about the teaching of reading and writing: that is, they believed that the creation of meaning in literacy was fundamental. They were more coherent in their belief systems about the teaching of literacy and tended to favour teaching activities which explicitly emphasised the deriving and the creating of meaning. In much of their teaching they were at pains to stress to pupils the purposes and functions of reading and writing tasks.

- Although they emphasised purpose, communication and composition in their belief statements, this did not mean that the more technical aspects of reading and writing processes were neglected. There was plenty of evidence that such aspects as phonic knowledge, spelling, grammatical knowledge and punctuation were prominent in the teaching of effective teachers of literacy. Technical aspects of literacy tended, however, to be approached in quite different ways by the effective teachers than by most of the teachers in the validation sample, i.e. as means to an end rather than an end in themselves.

- The key difference in approach was in the effective teachers' emphasis on embedding systematic attention to word and sentence level aspects of reading and writing within whole text activities which were both meaningful and explained clearly to pupils. Teachers in the validation sample were more likely to teach technical features as discrete skills for their own sakes, and did not necessarily ensure that pupils understood the wider purpose of such skills in reading and writing.

- Our finding concerning the beliefs of this group of effective teachers of literacy, that they prioritised the creation of meaning in their literacy teaching, thus reflects not that they failed to emphasise such skills as phonics, spelling, grammar etc. but rather that they were trying very hard to ensure that such skills were developed in children with a clear eye to the children's awareness of their importance and function.

Chapter 4

Effective teachers of literacy in action

4.1 Introduction

The aim of the project was to explore the factors underpinning the teaching practices of effective teachers of literacy. In the previous chapters we have discussed the features of knowledge and beliefs which characterised the effective teachers we studied. In this chapter we will outline our findings concerning the literacy teaching practices which these effective teachers said they used and those we actually observed them using. By doing this we will be able to show how their knowledge and beliefs were operationalised into classroom practice. This chapter will also be useful to teachers wishing to compare their own practices with those of these teachers whose pupils were making learning gains in literacy and whose practices were judged to be effective by their peers, their headteachers and inspectors.

Different sources of data were used to draw conclusions about aspects of teaching practice, having elicited at the outset information about learning outcomes.

- The questionnaire was used to obtain information about the literacy teaching activities which teachers reported having used during a normal school week.
- This teacher self-report was checked against our observations of classroom practice.
- The subsequent interviews allowed teachers to describe their practices and offer reasons for their use.

4.2 The range of reading activities

A section of the questionnaire completed by the effective teachers and the validation sample aimed to generate a snapshot of the types of reading and writing activities used in a normal teaching week. A number of reading and writing activities were listed and teachers asked to indicate which they had used during the previous week. They were also asked to name up to four other reading or writing activities they had used in that week. The results showed that use of reading activities was, perhaps not surprisingly, related to age phase. Whilst almost all the teachers read to their classes and heard children read, a greater proportion of teachers of infant classes reported that they had:

- taught letter sounds and names
- used flashcards
- used sequencing activities
- used big books
- involved other adults in the teaching of reading
- used reading scheme books
- used phonic exercises

In the subsequent observations, KS1 teachers were observed doing all these activities with classes or groups of children, whereas none of these activities were observed in the KS2 classes. This suggests a clear age phase differentiation in choice of teaching activity.

More teachers of Y3-7 children reported that they had used cloze activities and comprehension exercises although in the observations both KS1 and 2 teachers were observed using these techniques.

There were some differences between the use of reading activities reported by the effective teachers and by teachers in the validation sample. A greater proportion of effective infant teachers reported using big books than did the validation infant teachers. There were also some complex inter-relationships between patterns which became clearer when teachers' self reports and their actual practice were compared. For example, more teachers in the validation sample (at both age phases) reported using phonics exercises and flashcards than did the effective teachers, although both groups were roughly similar in their reported use of teaching letter sounds.

Observation of lessons revealed a different pattern. The effective teachers we observed taught letter sounds much more often than the validation sample, but there were differences in the ways the two groups approached this. The effective teachers were more likely to spend time looking at letter sounds in the context of reading a big book or a text written by the teacher and to do short, regular, modelling sounds activities. The validation sample were more likely to offer paper based exercises about sounds. This may explain the questionnaire finding about the use of big books. The teachers who reported using "big book sessions" might prefer this global description of what they were doing, which, in fact, was a more complex activity than it sounds, including work at text level and word level. In the case of a phonics worksheet there is not likely to be any other content focus.

We found in general that the effective teachers tended to use activities which involved work at more than one of text, sentence and word levels. They were thus actively assisting their pupils to make connections between these levels. The validation teachers, on the other hand, were more likely to use activities involving work at only one of these levels, limiting the explicit connections their pupils were encouraged to make.

Teachers were asked to name any other reading or writing activities they had used during the past week. A vast range of such activities were given and, to enable analysis, these were grouped into categories. For example "reading with another child", "two children reading a book together", "paired reading" and "reading with an older child" were all subsumed into the category "Paired reading". Forty two such categories were generated for reading activities.

Although a high proportion of both groups of teachers claimed to have used strategies to offer children reading experiences such as group reading, paired reading and taped books, a higher proportion of the effective teachers reported using reading games, reading in role play, reading environmental print, browsing among a range of books and silent reading. As many of these teachers stated in a previous section of the questionnaire that children need to know that print carries meaning, know the features and directionality of print and enjoy reading it might reasonably be concluded that these activities represented those felt to support such beliefs.

The forty two categories of reading activity were sorted into the following macro-categories, which reflect the teacher's choice of description:

- reading contexts (such as group reading and reading with an older child)
- reading different types of texts (such as reading stories, reading reference books, or reading posters)
- sub-word and word-level activities (such as letter recognition work and word games)
- sentence level activities (such as sentence building or grammar exercises)
- text level activities (such as prediction exercises or skimming and scanning for information)
- critical response and evaluation activities (such as group discussion of a text or children giving their response to a text).

The percentage of responses made by each sample in each macro-category is summarised in the table below.

Reading activities: macro-categories	Effective teachers	Validation group teachers
reading contexts	59.4	54.2
reading different text types	15.5	15.0
sub-word and word level activities	12.2	13.3
sentence level activities	2.5	5.8
text level activities	5.6	3.3
critical response and evaluation activities	4.1	5.0

The figures suggest that whilst both groups offered activities involving a range of reading formats and activities at a word and sub-word level, the effective teachers offered slightly more activities which provided a context for reading and slightly fewer sentence level activities. This suggests that the priority for this group of effective teachers of literacy was the provision of meaningful and motivating settings through which they could teach children the essential skills of reading.

This pattern was confirmed by observations of classroom activity. The effective teachers usually asked children to read whole texts in a variety of settings. However, as part of this work they placed emphasis on particular aspects of the texts, including structural features, vocabulary, word attack strategies, extracting information and enjoyment. The effective teachers were able to identify their teaching purpose for children reading a text clearly and also to identify what they wanted children to learn from reading that text. The teachers in the validation sample were more likely to be less clear about either their teaching purposes, the desired learning outcomes, or both.

The questionnaire results suggested a low incidence of activities at sentence level. However, evidence from classroom observation suggests that it is not the case that the effective teachers were ignoring sentence-level work, but rather that they preferred to teach about sentences and aspects of grammar through an initial focus on reading or writing a whole text. Although the effective teachers were teaching about sentence structure, they were less likely to highlight it as the overall aim of a lesson.

An example of this is Mrs G, who taught a poetry writing lesson to a Y3 class. A major focus of this was the use of adjectives to describe the images of winter which were the focus of the poetry session. To define these she drew up lists of things you might see on a winter day (nouns) and words which described these things (adjectives). When asked about the literacy content of the session she said it was a session to teach adjectives in the setting of writing a poem. She had chosen to do this to build upon work on nouns which the children had completed and intended this session to clarify the difference between the roles of nouns and adjectives. However, the aim of her lesson as indicated in her planning was "Poetry Writing". Like the majority of the effective teachers, she had embedded teaching of specific language features within a wider writing activity. This was less noticeable in the teaching of the validation sample, who tended to teach language features directly, without providing children with a clear context in which these features served a function.

The picture again emerges of effective teachers of literacy actively assisting their pupils to make connections between the text, sentence and word levels of literacy work. They were able to draw upon their knowledge of language to plan deliberately for these connections, a knowledge which, as we have argued in a previous chapter, was characterised by its functional and connected nature.

4.3 The range of writing activities

As with reading, the writing activities reported in the questionnaire by both the effective teachers of literacy and the validation teachers differed according to the age group they taught. The teachers of Y3-7 classes were more likely than the infant teachers to report that children wrote for audiences other than the teacher, wrote up after research and edited each other's work. A greater proportion of infant teachers reported children doing handwriting practice, copying out words, sounding out spellings and doing letter string exercises. This pattern was also evident in the classroom observations and may reflect several things: a developmental assumption about the sort of work children are capable of, the need for younger children to focus on a range of basic skills to enable them to make a start with reading and writing or the ability of older children to write more sustained texts.

The effective teachers of literacy reported more often than the validation teachers that they had used letter string exercises, interactive writing and writing for an audience other than the teacher. Classroom observations confirmed this. The effective teachers also reported less use of published materials and children copying out words written by the teacher. In the lessons observed the effective teachers at KS1 used published materials to consolidate points already taught, whereas the validation sample were more likely to use them as an introductory session.

In both reading and writing the effective teachers of literacy were able to provide a wider range of literacy teaching activities which emphasised using whole texts as a setting for learning about literacy. They were also less reliant on decontextualised exercises, deriving most of their teaching of sentence and word features from these whole texts.

When asked about other writing activities used the effective teachers reported using forty three other writing activities whereas the validation teachers reported thirty one. It is notable that most of the categories, reported by a large proportion of the teachers, relate to particular forms of writing. The

effective teachers were much more likely to report writing in role play, writing lists, writing instructions, collaborative writing and modelling or scribing for children. The validation teachers reported more reports/descriptions and spelling skills activities.

The macro-categories derived from this list of writing activities were as follows:

- forms of writing (such as writing letters or labels)
- contexts for writing (such as writing in role play or collaborative writing)
- word level activities (such as alphabet games or vocabulary study)
- sentence level activities (such as text marking or grammar exercises)
- text level activities (such as studying bias in writing or reviewing stories)

The percentage of responses made by each sample in each macro-category is summarised in the table below.

Writing activities: macro-categories	Effective teachers	Validation group teachers
forms of writing	62.4	63.0
contexts for writing	15.4	8.7
word level activities	9.1	15.2
sentence level activities	2.0	2.2
text level activities	10.6	9.8

The distribution of these activities is broadly similar across the two groups, although the effective teachers reported a greater proportion of activities which provide contexts for writing, such as group composition or revising writing with a partner, and the validation teachers reported a greater proportion of word level (principally spelling) activities. Both groups were alike in terms of the priority they seemed to place upon finding a range of forms in which children could write.

The classroom observations certainly confirmed that the effective teachers offered clearer contexts for the literacy activities they set. They generally took pains to relate tasks to work already completed, to explain the purpose of the knowledge to be taught and to relate the texts used to topics of class study.

We were particularly interested in the use of sentence level activities. Although both groups of teachers *reported* using few activities which were targeted on sentence level work, we found in our observations that, compared to the validation sample, the effective teachers were equally, or more, likely to focus on sentence level aspects of text in lessons. The ways in which both groups did this differed. The effective teachers tended to work on aspects of sentence grammar or punctuation in the context of the writing of whole texts and to show explicitly how that aspect of grammar contributed to meaning. The validation teachers tended to offer exercises which aimed to study only a particular aspect of sentence level grammar out of context. We made a similar point in the earlier section on reading activities and its replication here suggests a common pattern.

As an example of this, we give below a description of a lesson taught by Mrs J, a KS2 effective teacher.

> *Mrs J said the aim of her session was to teach the children in her class to write dialogue using the conventions of inverted commas and punctuation and to link this with the characters in the class novel.*
>
> *She started the session by reading a passage from The Demon Headmaster which included dialogue and used the appropriate conventions. The children followed the passage in shared copies of the text. She then used the blackboard to ask children questions about how this passage of direct speech was set out. She introduced the terms dialogue, inverted comma, comma, capital letter, speaker and asked children to define them and offer reasons why they were used that way. The class then collectively invented the rest of the dialogue, which she wrote on the blackboard with the children supplying the conventions and telling her how to place them. Most of the children volunteered information but Mrs J chose a few children to whom she directed particular questions. This introduction took less than 20 minutes.*

Mrs J then asked the children to work in pairs to write a dialogue between any two characters in the book. She said the dialogue had to reflect the personalities of the characters chosen and to be appropriately set out. The class had 20 minutes to complete the task and would then be performing their short dialogues for the other class members. As the children worked Mrs J went to work with three pairs of children in particular, one of whom she asked to work on the word processor. She spent approximately 10 minutes with these children, then walked around the class asking questions and offering help. The children worked industriously and appeared to feel the pressure of time upon them. Mrs J warned the children when there was 5 minutes to go and then stopped the class.

The pairs of children performed their dialogues. For each pair Mrs J commented on the way the words and intonation reflected the personality of the character and asked questions about the way they had set out the dialogue on paper. She checked their scripts as they handed them in. The children clearly enjoyed the activity and took her praise and pointers seriously.

The whole lesson took less than an hour. Following the lesson Mrs J briefly reported the children's level of attainment. She felt that the groups she had worked with were still unsure about the capital letter conventions for breaking an utterance, whilst the other children had generally mastered this aspect of the activity. She would be able to check this when she marked the scripts. In doing so she would look for use of inverted commas, commas, capital letters, new lines and appropriate choice of content.

It is notable here that Mrs J taught the use of inverted commas in the context of the class novel and took care to emphasise the function of written dialogue, rather than simply the rules for writing it. She was able to teach sentence level knowledge explicitly within the setting of a meaningful text, thus helping her pupils make vital connections between these two levels of knowledge. Again, this ability to make connections between two or more levels was characteristic of the effective teachers of literacy but not of the validation teachers. The effective teachers were able to draw upon their functional knowledge of language to plan deliberately for these connections.

4.4 Task Presentation and Lesson Structure

The lessons of the effective teachers were characterised by a brisk pace of work. A single school session (approximately a quarter of a school day) usually contained two or more tasks. They were generally teaching a daily literacy hour, even if this was not always of the exact format recommended by the National Literacy Project.

The effective teachers of literacy acted in ways which refocused children's attention on the literacy task at regular points in the session, made checks on progress and frequently asked children to provide examples of writing in progress, either for the teacher to comment on, or for the whole class to hear or comment upon, at both KS1 and KS2. This was not frequently observed in the validation classes. The use of time in effective teachers' classes was closely monitored, with teachers setting time limits for particular sub-tasks, such as planning, within the larger task, such as writing the beginning of the story. It was notable that this behaviour characterised not only the KS2 classes but even the reception classes, where the children were unlikely to have well developed sense of time. We concluded that in this way the effective teachers of literacy inducted their reception children into patterns of working which included focusing on a task and pushing themselves to complete it.

The beginnings and conclusions of sessions for groups and classes taught by the effective teachers had a number of distinct characteristics. In addition to clear focus and functional discussion, effective literacy teachers were observed using modelling extensively. Teachers used blackboards, flip charts, posters and whiteboards to demonstrate not only what was to be produced in a lesson, but also the processes involved. Effective teachers were observed to write dialogue, letters to fantasy characters, to skim and scan texts whilst describing thought processes, to write letters and collect words beginning with those letters, to make notes, demonstrate intonation in reading aloud, sing nursery rhymes, emphasising rhyme, select words from Breakthrough folders, model formal and informal speech,

punctuate text and many other examples. These acts offered children insights into how literacy tasks were achieved as well as what the aims of the tasks were. Models of thought in planning, drafting, correcting writing, making decisions, sounding out words and using dictionaries also punctuated the lessons of the effective teachers. One reception teacher told us a little about why she modelled writing for her class.

> *"I noticed when you demonstrated writing you talked about the capital letters, the pronoun I and exclamation marks. Why?"*
>
> *"Its something I do from the day they arrive at school. I demonstrate writing. I talk about what is happening on the flipchart and they begin to pick up adult conventions without a 'formal' lesson. It's our everyday approach."*
>
> *"Do you do it often?"*
>
> *"Oh yes, whenever I am demonstrating, not just in writing. I am always talking about the conventions of writing and what I am doing and I feel they are learning an awful lot more if they realise that it is just part of writing and reading. When they are reading to me we discuss where the full stops come and commas and speech marks. I am trying to train them to an awareness of everything so that if they question they will learn. But if no-one points things out to them they might not even ask."*

Both the effective teachers of literacy and the validation teachers used a wide range of questions. However, the effective teachers more frequently asked children how they accomplished tasks, how they made literacy decisions, what reading cues they used and to explain conclusions and comprehension decisions. For instance in Mrs J's lesson she asked:

> *"How do you know he doesn't mean it?"*
> *"It says so in the book."*
> *"What part? What tells you that?"*
> *"It says here, (points to the book) "... he said, laughing wickedly". It means that he says so, but he doesn't mean it. And he's like that, isn't he? I mean, from what sort of person he is. He isn't going to help really I don't think."*
> *"So you think that it's the way he laughs as he says it and what you know about him that tell you he doesn't mean it."*
> *"Yes."*
> *"He's lying then?"*

A teacher referring to a choice of word for a cloze passage asked:

> *"Why did you put in "tumbled" there then?"*
> *"Well, it fitted."*
> *"How did you know?"*
> *"I read the whole bit. To "... right by the shore line." and then went back and thought "a something down shack right by the shore line". It might be fallen. But it might be tumbled down, like in fairy stories. It's a bit like that."*
> *"So reading over the gap you found a word to fit in. Well done. I like it."*

One of the teachers writing her "news" for the children asked questions about her own writing.

> *"I went to... Well where?"*
> *Children call out: "Cinema? Shops? Supermarket?"*
> *"Yes, the supermarket. Do I put it here?" (positions pen at extreme right of flipchart)*
> *Children call out: "no, other side, down."*
> *"On the other side? And the next line? Why, why can't I start here?"*
> *Children call out: "it won't fit, the word won't fit, you need a new line."*
> *"OK on the new line so that we can read along and down. Supermarket begins with ?"*
> *Children call out "s,(s)"*

"Yes (s) is the sound and the letter is called?"
Children call out: "s"
"Yes 's' for supermarket." (Sounds out as she writes) "s oo p er m ar k et. All together." (all join in as she points). "I went to the supermarket. Its the new Safeway I went to. Who's been?"

These types of questions in whole class or group lessons were largely confined to the effective teachers and emphasise their concern for raising children's awareness of their own literacy use and comprehension. The use of these questions in whole class and group sessions lead children into thinking about what they are reading or writing at a very high level and offer them models of strategy use and comprehension. All the effective teachers we saw reading individually with children asked these types of question during individual reading interactions. Such questions are referred to in current learning theory as 'scaffolding' and act as supports which help children think at a higher level than they would be capable of if left entirely alone.

The lessons of the effective teachers of literacy were most likely to be concluded by review of the tasks accomplished or the teacher asking the children to present a report or extracts of their work. Such 'plenary' lesson conclusions are, of course, characteristic of the National Literacy Project literacy hour structure.

The classes of the effective teachers generally concluded the task assigned during the lessons. When this was not the case the teachers gave a clear indication of when the task would be concluded. At KS2 there was a marked contrast between this and the validation sample teachers, who were more likely to expect children to hand in work for subsequent marking without teacher comment or "rounding up". In a number of the validation lessons observed the teachers asked some children to "finish off later" but did not specify when. This gave these lessons a very much less obvious structure.

High levels of engagement with the literacy tasks were noted in the effective teachers' classes, possibly reflecting the careful focusing by teachers and the academic press resulting from a brisk pace and monitoring.

4.5 Differentiation of content and tasks

The ways teachers differentiated the content of lessons for different children had implications for the ways they organised the class activity. A number of arrangements were observed, but there appeared to be some definite patterns.

Teachers were asked "Was the content of that session different for different children?". In a small proportion of lessons of both the validation group and the effective teachers the teacher set different tasks for different children, depending on their perceived needs. In the effective teachers' classes examples observed included individualised spelling tests in which children tested each other, and individual reading where books were matched to a child's perceived abilities.

However, in most classes the teachers offered the same literacy content for all the children, although this did not necessarily mean that all children did the same task at the same time. There were a range of ways in which the work undertaken was differentiated for pupils. Overwhelmingly the way work was differentiated took account of the children's abilities as perceived by the teacher. In some cases, mostly in the lessons of the validation sample, teachers said they differentiated the outcomes of the session, so that they held different expectations for different pupils. This was not necessarily evident to the researcher or the children. In the effective teachers' classes this approach was taken to routine individual activities such as silent reading, and reading "carousel"* activities.

A much more frequently observed pattern in the classes of the effective teachers was for teachers to set the same task for all the children but to differentiate the amount of support they gave to the children to

* A reading carousel is a system in which the teacher has organised several group or individual reading tasks for her class. In one lesson, or part of a lesson, these tasks are allocated to specific groups and in the next lesson the groups each move on to a different reading task.

help them achieve the learning target. The support given included offering much more detailed instructions on sheets, work cards, and posters, and offering scaffolding devices such as writing frames. It also included teachers or classroom assistants working with particular (not always the least able) groups, and offering transcription help for writers (scribing or using the computer). For example in a lesson with Miss L.'s Y 3 class:

> *The children were asked to write a letter to their future teacher to introduce themselves. The task and required product was the same for all the children, indeed, the whole school would be doing this task at some time, to help the teachers get to know their future classes. Miss L gave the whole class an introduction in which she explained not only why the letters would be useful to the writer and recipient but also examined the features of a sample letter. The class then divided into four seating groups and began to work on individual drafts. One group received little support, apart from notes made on a whiteboard during the whole class introduction. The second group were referred to a poster about the features of a letter and the main points emphasised. The other two groups used a "writing frame" with questions to focus the content and language of the lesson. In addition the teacher worked particularly with the least able members of the class.*

One teacher mentioned the effect of offering this support on her planning:

> *"It depends what the activity is. I say I would probably, if it is particularly, you know, a teaching point, I may well have to work with one group and stay with them and plan accordingly, so that the other groups are much more self contained where they are not going to need as much support. I tend to introduce things to the whole class and then we split into groups."*

This approach to differentiating the content of literacy sessions to meet the perceived needs of the children was organised in a number of ways. In KS2 classes children were most likely to all work individually on the same task at the same time. In KS1 classes teachers also organised tasks so that different groups did them at different times, presumably to organise the use of teacher's time. In one reception class, for example, one of the teacher's literacy aims for the day she was observed was to introduce her class to the structure of a recipe, as an example of instructional genre. (The class had made cakes the previous week and had followed a recipe written out by the teacher.) She organised her class into activity groups, with some help from classroom assistants and volunteer parents. During the lesson observed, she worked firstly with a group of the least able children, who had not yet really made a start at reading and writing. With this group, she talked about how they had made their cakes and showed them some recipe books. They discussed items like the list of ingredients and the pictures of the things to be cooked. The session ended by the teacher scribing as the children told her the ingredients they had used to make their cakes. The class then rotated to different activities and the teacher worked with a much more able group. She covered essentially the same content with them but these children were asked to begin writing their cake recipes for themselves using the structure she had shown them.

4.6 Classroom literacy environments

The notion of providing an optimum environment to support literacy activity in schools has been popular in recent years. During our classroom observations for this project we made notes of the features, use and children's response to the literacy provision in the classes observed. Three main qualities characterised the literacy environments of the effective teachers: presence, function and use by children.

Although most of the classes contained evidence of efforts on the part of teachers to provide appropriate resources for literacy learning, there was clearly much more priority given to this in the effective teachers' classes. In addition the effective teachers had made efforts to draw the children's attention to features and functions of literacy.

These classes featured resources such as alphabet friezes, word banks, displays of books at an appropriate age level, displays of books related to the topic under consideration, listening centres,

reference books, reading scheme books, language master machines, word games and computers (although only one instance of computer use was seen). These resources were not always new and teachers clearly drew on a range of sources, including school resources, materials brought in by children, schools library services and a museum service.

The classes were labelled with the names of areas, drawers and containers, injunctions to use the resources and instructions for looking up words, revising text, editing text, selecting books, changing library books, using dictionaries, and using mnemonics. Work by pupils was displayed, usually, but not always, at child eye level.

Whilst many of these items are a normal part of the primary classroom at KS1 and 2 they were very much more in evidence in the classes of effective teachers than in the classes of validation teachers. However, the functions and use of these items also particularly distinguished the classes of the effective teachers of literacy.

Many more of the items in the effective teachers' classes had a clear function. For instance, posters instructing children about aspects of writing, posters and leaflets about using dictionaries or libraries, labels to assist children in finding resources, "flashes" with notices attracting attention to new materials or displays and suggestion boxes. These were in sharp contrast to the much less functional displays in validation classes where it was more common to see displays of children's work used purely to decorate classroom walls with no obvious link to current reading and writing work being done in the class.

Teachers in these classes were observed directing children's attention to the items and using them as a support strategy for particular groups of children undertaking tasks. Children were observed using instructions to perform reading and writing tasks such as using "the five finger" test* from a wall poster to select a reading book, using an index of the Dewey library system to select an information book, looking through a "mini-beasts" word-bank for a word to use in writing, using a laminated alphabet card to "sound out" a spelling and using a "language master" machine to check an unknown spelling. This may, of course, be a reflection of purely organisational strategies to allow primary aged readers and writers a degree of independence. However the effect of this was to necessitate reading and the use of text to perform reading and writing tasks.

In some of the KS1 classes (almost all the reception classes and two others) dramatic play areas included a high literacy content, reflecting the questionnaire finding that effective teachers reported much more writing in role play. Books, newspapers, directories, paper, forms and posters were provided as a part of dramatic play. For instance, in one reception class groups of children playing in the "post office" wrote letters to friends, filled in forms and sorted parcels whilst other groups of children completed more "formal" literacy tasks. No direct comparison of these situations with the validation sample was made as none of the validation classes included dramatic play areas.

4.7 Assessment and monitoring of literacy tasks

The questionnaire completed by the effective teachers and the validation group collected information about their use of a variety of approaches to the assessment of literacy development. Assessment strategies were also a focus of the classroom observations and subsequent interviews.

4.7.1 Assessment strategies reported

* The five finger test is a simple readability measure in which children are asked to select a page from a book they wish to read. They read the page and place a finger on each word they cannot read. If they have used up all the fingers of one hand by the time they reach the end of the page, then the book is probably too hard for them.

Respondents to the questionnaire were asked to indicate against a list of approaches to the assessment of literacy whether and how often they used these. The summaries of their responses are given in the following table. The figures represent the percentages of each group of teachers who said they used that approach either a great deal or quite often.

Assessment strategy	Effective teachers	Validation teachers
Teacher-made tests	39.9	46.5
Tests from published schemes	7.0	19.8
Standardised tests	14.5	19.7
Marking written products	53.1	47.9
Miscue analysis	26.7	12.7
Running records	58.8	55.0
Observation of children	93.2	84.5
Children's self-assessment	51.7	33.8

While we know that the schools in which the effective teachers teach do administer standardised reading tests (this was one of the bases on which these teachers were selected), these figures suggest that the effective teachers of literacy were less likely than the validation teachers to place reliance upon tests for their assessment in literacy. They were more likely to use assessment techniques such as marking, error analysis and observation. It may be that these teachers regard standardised tests as having other purposes than directly informing their teaching, such as monitoring standards from year to year. One teacher, talking about her use of tests, commented:

> *(Standardised tests give a) good indication of where the child is at, but it's not very diagnostic. It doesn't help me point out where the problems are. The SATs test is actually much more diagnostic in the way that it throws up what the specific problems are. I think to use one (a test) that was more diagnostic would just take up so much time, which obviously, we haven't got to spend on an individual basis.*

4.7.2 Other assessment strategies

Questionnaire respondents named other approaches to assessment in literacy which they used and which were not included in the list given. A further fifty five approaches were added by the effective teachers of literacy. These included such ideas as 'reading conferences' (mentioned by 20% of those responding), analysis of samples of writing (15.6%), statement bank (11.1%), peer assessment (11.1%), moderation (8.9%), alphabet recognition (8.9%). Only three validation group teachers wrote anything here, two adding 'reading conferences' and one 'baseline assessment', reinforcing the pattern of more intensive use of a narrower range of strategies.

4.7.3 Assessment strategies observed

A number of the monitoring and assessment strategies mentioned in the questionnaires were observed in lessons taught by effective teachers of literacy, including: recording pupils' use of reading and writing strategies, noting pupils' enjoyment of group and individual reading, discussing reading diaries with children, marking work in progress, returning marked work, asking children how they had achieved a task or taken a decision, asking children to provide further examples, taking reports of group and individual reading from assistants and parent helpers.

Some of the effective teachers appeared to monitor the whole class by walking around looking at work in progress and questioning individual pupils or groups. This, however, was a minority activity more often seen in the validation sample lessons at KS2. In general the effective teachers worked particularly closely with one group of children, probing, questioning and supporting, and made intermittent "rounds" of the class to observe the activities of the children. The "conclusions" of the lessons already described, in which children read out or discussed samples of work, also offered teachers an opportunity to monitor progress.

The teachers were also asked how they monitored or assessed the lesson observed. The answers of the effective teachers were surprisingly consistent. Almost all the teachers cited observation as the chief tool they had used in assessing the sessions observed and gave examples of their observations about particular children

> *"Well, observation assessment, clearly. The teacher is so engaged in moving around and doing that you can only assess by observation in that situation. What I'll do now, or even tonight, is in my planning and assessment folder. That's together. I'll make comments on various children. So I just have a child's name at the top of each sheet of paper and I put down, a sense that's only the teacher's log. I won't make a comment on every child, that's not possible, and I would never say to you that it is possible, because that puts pressure on other people. But over the year I will make observations on every child several times."*

Many of the teachers went on to describe their methods of recording these observations.

> *"Well we have a tick sheet for their letter sounds which I go through perhaps once every few weeks at the moment to check they can still say their sounds. So that is formal assessment, but I keep a tick sheet of their work that they've finished. For the writing we have an evaluation and I record that on their termly record card."*

> *"Well, the first record we keep is the pre-reading skills that I fill in after about half a term from my notes. That's the first one. I chat with parents about it at the first Open Night... after that I move off onto sight words and make a summative record "Knows the first 20 words" and sign and date it."*

> *"I have a written summary of what's happened in a group reading session. That's what's in the ..., I have a group reading record book, which is divided into six groups, for my ability groups and the mum who is reading with them will record, basically, how well the child read, whether they were interested, whether they took an active part in discussion. Well, they have the chart of 15 questions and teaching points about the group reading to discuss: title, author, ISBN, characters, you know. So I get a written summary from that."*

Most of the effective teachers also mentioned other assessment techniques including discussion with children and records of individual reading and inspection of writing products.

The assessment and recording emphasis for the effective teachers appeared to be slightly different for reading and writing tasks. All the teachers told us about individual reading records which were kept continuously with the involvement of parents and helpers, and sometimes children. In writing a collection of examples was reported and the use of National Curriculum levels to make periodic judgements. Where teachers discussed the use of records there were two main emphases: periodic checks on the progress and targets of children by reviewing the evidence collected:

> *"Say, every half term I have a look and glance back at what they've done, then I write what I think they need. Unless, sometimes, it might be obvious what she needs to work on, in fact that word "went" I'm going to reinforce a bit with her, so I might write that down. But usually I do what they need next every half term."*

> *"I have got to teach those children something. Whatever I do those children have got to be learning something. So I know where those children are in the scheme of things and I know what they need to get out of a particular session. Its just knowing what you have to do with them."*

> *"It is really for, to show you where a child is and what he can do and any significant changes in reading behaviour. Also if the head wants to know where a child is, say every half term."*

These attitudes to assessment contrasted with the responses from the validation sample a number of whom said they had not assessed at all during the lessons observed and cited future occasions on

which those skills or abilities would be assessed. There was more concern with assessing against a class target than an individual approach.

This suggests that the teachers in the validation sample were likely to be more concerned with discrete skills and the meeting of class targets, whereas the effective teachers placed more emphasis upon identifying and developing the skills of individual children and saw assessment as enabling them to do this.

4.8 Summary

This summary of our findings concerning the teaching practices of the effective teachers of literacy does, we hope, suggest in its own right some very important features of effective teaching. The major findings emerging from our research concerning the teaching practices of effective teachers are as follows:

- There were some differences between the reading activities likely to be employed by the effective teachers and the teachers in the validation group. The effective teachers made more use of big books in their teaching, they were also more likely to use other adults to assist their classroom work. The validation teachers made more use of phonic exercises and flashcards, although both groups were similar in the extent to which they reported and were observed to teach letter sounds. The difference was in the ways they went about this. The effective teachers tended to teach letter sounds within the context of using a text (often a big book) and to use short, regular teaching sessions, often involving them modelling to the children how sounds worked (by, for example, writing examples of letter groups on a flip-chart). The validation teachers were much more likely to approach letter sound teaching through the use of paper exercises.

- The effective teachers were generally much more likely to embed their teaching of reading into a wider context. They tended to use whole texts as the basis from which to teach skills such as vocabulary, word attack and recognition and use of text features. They were also very clear about their purposes for using such texts.

- In lessons involving writing the differences between the two groups of teachers were less clear although it did seem that the effective teachers were more likely to use published teaching materials as a way of consolidating the language points they had already taught their children, whereas for the validation teachers, these materials were often used to introduce a teaching session. This suggests that a similar point to that made about reading work also applies in the case of writing work. The effective teachers generally tried to ensure their teaching of language features was contextualised for their children and that the children understood the purpose of this teaching. Their chief means of achieving such contextualisation was to focus teaching on a shared text. Language features were taught, and explained to the children, as a means of managing this shared text rather than as a set of rules or definitions to be learnt for their own sakes.

- The effective teachers of literacy, because of their concern to contextualise their teaching of language features within shared text experiences, made explicit connections for their pupils between the text, sentence and word levels of language study.

- The lessons of the effective teachers were all conducted at a brisk pace. They regularly refocused children's attention on the task at hand and used clear time frames to keep children on task. They also tended to conclude their lessons by reviewing, with the whole class, what the children had done during the lesson. Lessons which ended with the teacher simply saying, "We'll finish this tomorrow", were much more common among the validation teachers.

- The effective teachers used modelling extensively. They regularly demonstrated reading and writing to their classes in a variety of ways, often accompanying these demonstrations by verbal explanations of what they were doing. In this way they were able to make available to the children their thinking as they engaged in literacy.

- Some effective teachers differentiated the work they asked pupils to do by allotting different tasks on the basis of ability. These teachers also, however, used another approach to differentiation by varying the support given to particular groups of children when they were engaged on tasks the whole class would do at some point. By this means they were able to keep their classes working more closely together through a programme of work.

- The classrooms of the effective teachers were distinguished by the heavy emphasis on literacy in the environments which had been created. There were many examples of literacy displayed in these classrooms, these examples were regularly brought to the children's attentions and the children were encouraged to use them to support their own literacy.

- The effective teachers had very clear assessment procedures, usually involving a great deal of focused observation and systematic record-keeping. This contributed markedly to their abilities to select appropriate literacy content for their children's needs.

Chapter 5

Knowledge, beliefs and practice in effective teachers of literacy.

5.1 Introduction

Central to the argument presented in this report is the assumption that an important factor in children's achievement in literacy is the teaching they experience in class. This is circumscribed by a variety of social, curricular and resource-based factors. But the teacher remains at the heart of the teaching process, selecting, structuring and presenting the content to be taught and so influencing directly the learning of literacy.

This research sought to examine whether effective teachers of literacy

- had a well developed knowledge of the subject and its pedagogical principles which underpinned their teaching
- had coherent belief systems about the teaching of their subject
- systematically matched particular teaching methods, materials and classroom tasks to the needs of pupils

Although previous research had not demonstrated that these features were characteristic of effective teachers of literacy, they gave us a research focus and a set of working hypotheses, as outlined earlier in this report.

5.2 Literacy teacher's knowledge

There is evidence that effective teachers of other subjects tend to possess a well developed knowledge base in those subjects. However, it has not yet been established that effective teachers of literacy are in a similar position with regard to their 'subject'. For the purpose of this research, we extrapolated from research on teachers of other subjects and developed a series of detailed hypotheses pertaining to teachers of literacy. These are outlined in Chapter 1 of this report.

The study investigated these aspects of subject knowledge and found that the literacy content knowledge of effective teachers of literacy appeared to be embedded in their teaching; that is, it was understood and known in relation to a practical teaching context rather than in a formalised, abstract way. The effective teachers of literacy taught children elements of language in ways which emphasised getting them to understand how parts of language work, how levels of language knowledge are connected and when and how these language features are used. This contrasted with the tendency among the validation sample to teach language as a set of rules and definitions.

We suggest that the content knowledge held by effective teachers of literacy cannot be readily separated from understanding of its use or from their beliefs about how it should be taught. This has very particular implications for teacher education, which we discuss later in the report.

5.3 Literacy teachers' beliefs

Evidence from the project supports our hypothesis: that effective teachers of literacy have developed a coherent set of beliefs about the teaching and the learning of literacy which influence their selection of teaching approaches. The findings indicate that effective teachers of literacy are likely to believe that reading and writing are principally concerned with the communication of meaning and that technical features of language are taught as a means to this end. They therefore place high value upon composition, understanding of text and of the purposes and use of elements of language. They are less likely to stress language rules formulae to be applied.

5.4 The practices of literacy teachers

The literature on effective teaching in literacy suggests that there are particular teaching techniques which appear to be linked with pupil progress in reading and writing. Our evidence suggests that effective teachers of literacy are likely to employ such techniques in a strategic way: that is, with a very clear purpose linked to the identified literacy needs of specific pupils. The teaching techniques we specifically investigated included the following:

- The deliberate and systematic teaching of the formal structures of written language.
- The creation of "literate environments" designed to enhance children's understandings of the functions of literacy and to provide opportunities for regular and sustained practice of literacy skills.
- The provision of a range of models and examples of effective use of reading and writing.
- The design and provision of focused tasks appropriate to pupils' ages and abilities with academic content that will engage their full attention and enthusiasm.
- The continuous monitoring of pupils' progress through the tasks provided and the use of assessment to inform teaching and report on progress.
- The assistance given to pupils in making explicit and systematic connections between text, sentence and word levels of language knowledge.

Our findings suggest that the ways in which teachers use particular practices reflect their beliefs about teaching and learning literacy. This is particularly evident in the ways effective teachers tend to teach specific elements of language by emphasising their functions rather than by simply giving sets of rules. It is also evident in their concern to provide meaningful contexts for pupils' work in literacy.

5.5 Effective teachers at work

At this point in the report we will describe in further detail two effective teachers of literacy from our sample. These two teachers embody many of the findings of the research and offer a flavour of the knowledge, beliefs and teaching practices of the effective teachers of literacy in the study. For each teacher we will include an account of a single teaching session which we observed and a summary of their beliefs and knowledge taken from the data we collected during the project. We will conclude by summarising what it is about these two teachers which characterises them as effective teachers of literacy. It should be remembered that these teachers were studied before teaching approaches such as those embodied in National Literacy Strategy and the literacy hour were current.

5.6 Effective teacher 1: Mrs W

Training and professional development

Mrs W had A levels in science subjects and qualified as a teacher with a Cert. Ed. in the late 1970s following three years of study. She had been teaching in primary schools for more than 10 years, during which time she had taught both juniors and infants. Her current post included responsibility for English in a suburban First School with seven classes, where she had a class of Y2 children.

Mrs W felt her initial teacher education took place too long ago to be relevant to her teaching now. In the current year Mrs W had been involved in 1-5 days in-service training focused on the teaching of reading and writing which included sessions she led in school and two short LEA courses at a local teachers' centre. She felt that the short courses had kept her in touch with recent initiatives but had not particularly affected her views about the teaching of literacy.

When asked what has been significant to her in becoming a teacher of literacy Mrs W identified a number of experiences. One was the Certificate of Advanced Professional Studies (CAPS) in primary language which she completed two years ago at the local University. She said that this course gave her time to consider the whole basis of her literacy teaching and to forge a strong philosophy about literacy teaching. This had guided her choice of teaching methods and materials, and given her clear principles for using these. Certain tutors and course sessions, especially lectures, and working with other teachers to complete her own research had inspired and enthused Mrs W. Her literacy teaching

philosophy had been particularly useful in assimilating new initiatives in recent years especially in conjunction with the school based work she had done to write a new scheme of work. This had given her the opportunity to spend time in the classes of her colleagues and talk with them. She felt this had not only benefited the school by ensuring that the scheme of work was coherent, practical and "owned" by the whole staff, but it had also improved her classroom skills and given her new ideas.

Mrs W felt that her role as English co-ordinator was an important factor in her development as an effective teacher of literacy as she felt it gave her professional responsibility and really "got her into" literacy. Mrs W also identified the short courses she had attended and the co-ordinator's support group as important in "keeping up to date" in the teaching of literacy, but cautioned that she did not make changes to her approaches to teaching without considering them very carefully and discussing them with other teachers.

Mrs W found the content of her CAPS course relevant to her needs and generally found short courses interesting. In her questionnaire she marked courses on grammar and phonological awareness as the least useful she had attended and she felt these were much less practically relevant than the others she had enjoyed.

Literacy teaching practices

We observed Mrs W teach two sessions, one of which is reported below. In both sessions Mrs W organised two activities and divided up the class so that some children worked with ancillary staff or students. She showed us her planning for the sessions on school planning sheets she had helped to develop. Mrs W was happy to show us her record book, in which she regularly made notes about children's performance in English, the children's individual reading records, which included detailed comments from teacher, helpers and parents and the results from the standardised reading tests she administers twice a year. She could tell us, in detail, about the performance of individual pupils.

Mrs W's room included displays of topic and fiction books, labels on all equipment and posters telling children how to change library books. The displays on the walls were at the children's eye level and contained questions about a poster as well as work by the children. A set of stories written as books and bound by the children were available for others to read. A listening centre, in the book area, was used by some of the children who were browsing among the books and a good range of taped stories were available.

In the lesson we observed, Mrs W started by doing a big book session with all the children in the class, which took about 20 minutes. The children clearly knew the routine and settled immediately. They were attentive and enthusiastic throughout both sessions. Mrs W started by asking children questions about the cover of the book, such as "What do you think it will be about?" "How do you know?" and picked up their responses about the title, picture and author. She repeated these terms and added "illustration" when she asked the children more about their ideas. When she turned the first page she pointed out the title and author again and asked the children what the ISBN number meant. Several of them knew, but others obviously did not, so she explained.

Mrs W read the book in unison with the class, pausing before the final word of each line to see whether they could guess the rhyming word. Within a page or two all the children were eagerly offering guesses. Mrs W also pointed out the beginning sound of ch- th- and ph- words and -ing suffixes, which seemed to be a focus for some children. After the first reading, children were picked to read out a line each. Mrs W then went through and read out the rhymes.

Mrs W asked children questions about the story and what they thought about it, commenting on the funny bits and laughing with the children. Using the paper on the easel she wrote up some words and asked the children for other words which rhymed with them. At first only a few children made guesses, but within four or five guesses the majority of the children seemed to have ideas to offer. Mrs W then picked out some words ending in -ing and collected more from the children in the same way, asking the children to come up and write them on the easel.

Following the big book session, Mrs W set the children working in three groups. One group went to browse among the books and read individually with an ancillary teacher. Another group went off to work on a comprehension passage related to the big book they had just read, with the support of a student. Mrs W said that all the children would complete these activities but at different times, so that the extra assistance of helpers and parents could be used effectively.

Mrs W herself worked with 16 children on a cloze[1] passage written on the blackboard. It was the start of a fairy story, as story beginnings were the writing focus for the fortnight in the class. The children were asked to read the passage carefully and given a few moments to do so. Individuals then volunteered to read it out sentence by sentence, saying "something" for each blank. Mrs W pointed out the full stops and capitals around each sentence. Mrs W read the passage through aloud and then asked the children what it was about and how they knew. The children picked out the clues of standard phrases "once upon a ...", and items of meaning to suggest a theme and some detail for the story. They then worked in twos and threes to make a list of the words which would fit into the blanks. This took about 15 minutes. Mrs W then went through the passage evaluating all answers and asking the children to evaluate them against the questions "does that make sense?" and "does it sound right like that?". Mrs W also repeatedly asked children how they had worked out a word. One child said he had "read over" the spaces to see what was needed, by which he meant reading the text with appropriate intonation and a slight pause at each gap. Mrs W asked others if they could do this. She then demonstrated how you could "read over" a space to see what would make sense and sound right in the space.

Children were keen to defend their choice of words and say why alternatives did not make sense or sounded wrong. Mrs W tried out all the suggestions and accepted answers with appropriate meanings which were the right parts of speech, but allowed several possible answers in some spaces, saying which ones she preferred and why. Finally, Mrs W read the whole passage with the spaces filled, reading out the alternatives, congratulated the children and reminded them that "reading over" a space or word they didn't know was another way to help them guess what would make sense and what would sound right.

When Mrs W was asked about this session she identified the literacy content as "a big book session, with rhymes and *-ing* as the focus". She said she had also emphasised three particular sounds as she was concerned about a small group of children who were still having difficulty with them. The second part of the session she called "reading a story beginning to practice using semantic and syntactic reading cues". She identified the children who could do rhymes, -ing words and use a full range of reading cues to some extent and those who were still starting on these skills.

Beliefs about the teaching of literacy

The beliefs section of Mrs W's questionnaire suggested she was moderately oriented towards a view of teaching reading which emphasised the communication of meaning as a vehicle through which to teach processes and towards an orientation in teaching writing which emphasised children composing. Her reactions to the tasks suggested in the questionnaire was consistent with these beliefs and she strongly approved of the use of taped books, big books and teaching children to revise in writing. In her interview she said she had a very strong philosophy about teaching reading and writing which was based on the need for children to understand how and why they should read and write. She aimed to make all tasks understandable and, for this reason, she preferred tasks involving whole texts like stories or posters through which she was able to teach features ranging from knowledge of how texts are constructed to detailed items about grammar etc.. Mrs W also pointed out that, whilst she liked children to share books and do "emergent" writing, she had structured handwriting, phonics and spelling schemes of work which recognised and built on children's achievements and made sure they were "always moving on" and that she knew exactly what they could do.

[1] A cloze passage is a text in which certain words have been deleted. Pupils have to work together to suggest possible replacement words to complete the passage.

Subject knowledge for teaching literacy

In her questionnaire, Mrs W wrote that children beginning to read should learn:

> *"That books are exciting, how a book works, and to talk like a book, using memory, initially, to help them make stories from books themselves."*

In writing, children needed:

> *"A model from other children and adults, of writing, to write as part of play situations and to recognise when writing is useful"*

At KS2 young readers needed:

> *"To be able to express critical opinions about books. To use books and other material to retrieve information and to enjoy a wider range of book types"*, and writers: *"To continue to develop different writing styles. To learn about the language of writing so that they can talk about it. To continue to progress in the technicalities of writing, including spelling, grammar etc."*

Mrs W had clear ideas about the differences between early literacy and literacy at KS2. She chose things which reflected her beliefs in enjoyment and creation of meaning, but also which reflected her concern to get children to understand how literacy works and what they should do. This was demonstrated practically in the way she used questioning and modelling in her teaching, such as in her use of shared reading involving a big book during the course of reading which she systematically engaged children in discussion of textual features such as title, author and illustrations before moving on to work on beginning sounds in words.

In the literacy quiz, Mrs W scored well above the average for effective teachers. She was able to recognise nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions and articles as well as syllables and morphemes. She could not manage phonemic or sound segmentation. This was rather surprising, as in the lesson observed she had broken down four words into sounds on the easel for the children and spent some time showing us her scheme of work for teaching sounds.

She scored 18 on the children's author recognition test (the same as the mean for effective teachers) showing that she has a good knowledge of children's literature. Mrs W was very analytical in her discussion of the quiz examples of pupils' writing and reading. She raised almost every possible point. In the writing samples she mentioned the content and structural issues first, then discussed spelling and capitals. In the reading samples she asked many questions about the children's related experience and gave a very thorough assessment, full of expert inference.

5.7 Effective teacher 2: Miss L

Training and professional development

Miss L had English, Biology and French A levels as well as a BEd degree which she completed in 1992. She had been teaching for four years in a Junior school of 12 classes, where she had been English co-ordinator for a year. For the past two years she had taught Y3. When asked what had helped her to become an effective teacher of literacy Miss L replied:

> *"Well, I've brought things with me from college of course, and I've seen other people working and been into schools and seen different things happening there. Of course, I've had good courses and support."*

Miss L found her initial teacher education useful in preparing her to teach, and could pick out sessions and issues which had been particularly important for her, both in her University and on school practice.

"When I came here four years ago I didn't feel in any way under-prepared. I felt lucky, I mean it might have been a particularly good course, but I could tackle most things and you learn through experience. When things go wrong you think "I won't do that again" and you do learn management skills with experience too."

Miss L she felt she had learned at least as much since she started teaching, especially about assessment.

Miss L had participated in 5 days' literacy in-service provision in the previous year. Three of these days were organised by her to bring the English advisor into school to work on school needs as identified in a pre-Ofsted inspection. The other two were days out at co-ordinators' workshops. In her experience of CPD she found opportunities to try out ideas in the classroom, practical feedback from an expert and working with other teachers particularly useful. She also identified involvement in an LEA project to select suitable reading materials for each year group as particularly important. Miss L felt that becoming English co-ordinator had had most effect on her knowledge and practice, since, as a result, she had started to read publications, keep up to date with ideas and initiatives and make contact with other co-ordinators. When rating the content of literacy professional development sessions, Miss L found sessions on reading and writing processes most useful and sessions on grammar and spelling development least useful as she found these hard to recall.

Literacy teaching practices

Miss L taught more than one activity during both the sessions we observed. The session reported here was the first session we observed and involved both a reading carousel session and a whole class letter writing activity. Miss L had very explicit termly, fortnightly and daily plans which showed us that this session was part of a scheme of work for letter writing. Miss L also showed us her records of pupils' progress, including standardised scores, observation notes, individual reading sheets and miscue analysis (in some cases). All the children had a portfolio of work, which they chose in conjunction with the teacher and parents to "show what they could do."

Miss L's room was visually stimulating, with colourful book cover displays, word webs about the current topic, charts of spelling strings, posters about editing text, book rating scales and other labels. The room contained a book corner with a range of good quality (well thumbed) fiction books and a smaller display of topic books from the library service. The children clearly displayed a proportion of the work themselves and did so to a high standard. Outside the class, in the library, there were displays of the Dewey system, of books and listening centres, taped books and books on CD-ROM.

In the lesson we observed, Miss L started the afternoon with a reading carousel. This involved children consulting a chart on the wall and dividing into groups. Each group did one of the following tasks:

- reading and discussing a book with a parent who was sitting in the library
- doing a listening task involving a taped book and a work-card of questions
- group reading from a set of the same books with another parent in the library
- browsing in the book corner amongst non-fiction books
- completing a dictionary use task

Miss L worked with the dictionary group. She explained that all the children would complete all these tasks each week, although next week she would choose a new task to replace the dictionary task. The children were engaged and enthusiastic. They talked quietly to each other and the parents and teachers. After 20 minutes the groups put away the activities and settled into their places. As the children packed up, Miss L took brief verbal reports from the two parents about the performance of individual children and the groups, and looked at the notes the parents had made on the sheets provided by Miss L. She later explained that she worked with these parents regularly and had trained them to monitor and record these tasks.

For the second part of the session, Miss L introduced a letter writing task. She reminded the children that next year they would be Y4 and they discussed their expectations and new teacher. Miss L then

said they should all write to that teacher so that the new teacher could have some information about her class in advance. This is a normal transition task in the school and all the children would do it. Miss L discussed with the children what they would like to tell the teacher about themselves, their personalities, and their strengths at school. She asked them how they wanted their new teacher to think about them. She then chose several responses and discussed different ways they might express one idea to give different impressions. Finally Miss L discussed how such a letter might be set out, including address, salutation and paragraphing. Using the notes accumulated on the whiteboard from the introduction, which included prompts for content and layout, Miss L wrote a sample letter on the flipchart to tell her next class what they might expect when they come up to her. The children made suggestions about content and layout.

Miss L then described the task to the children again, stressing that they were to write a first draft, which would need to be edited later. Miss L told the children that they had 30 minutes to do their drafts, and informed the whole class when 15 minutes had elapsed and when there were only 5 minutes left. She asked the children to work in their seatwork groups and pointed out some sources of support. One group used the notes on the board as prompts. A second group used a poster about letter writing on the wall which gave rather more detailed prompts. Miss L talked through the poster so that they were all aware of its contents and how to use it. For two groups she provided writing frames which offered sentences to help children organise paragraphs. Miss L worked with one of these groups and only occasionally went round the class to check on the progress of other pupils.

At the end of the session most of the children had completed drafts. Miss L asked for volunteers to read out paragraphs. She selected four children who read out their work and accepted comments from them about the content, the impression created and whether the piece was all on one theme, so being a paragraph. Miss L concluded the lesson by saying that they would revise and edit the pieces on Thursday.

Beliefs about the teaching of literacy

The beliefs section of Miss L's questionnaire suggested she tended towards an orientation in the teaching of reading which stressed the importance of communication and an orientation in the teaching of writing which stressed the writing process. She disapproved, in particular, of an emphasis on writing presentation which overwhelmed composition. The tasks in the questionnaire which she valued were consistent with these views; she selected big books, taped stories, writing frames and revising writing over other tasks. At interview Miss L talked about the need for children to enjoy reading, develop confidence and receive enough support. She seemed particularly concerned with rigorous assessment and kept extremely detailed records. A key concern to her was breaking up the English curriculum in a way which fitted in with the pupils' developing understanding of issues whilst at the same time offering a clear progression in literacy with a scheme of work to follow. She was also very concerned that children should have both challenging literature and time to read old favourites. To this end she was working with the LEA advisor to draw up lists of books suitable for each year group.

Subject knowledge for teaching literacy

In her questionnaire she differentiated clearly between the knowledge needed by beginning readers and writers and by those at KS2. At KS2 she specified children should:

> *"Read a range of challenging texts. Learn how to find information in books and make sure that they know how to evaluate books."*

Writers needed to:

> *"Use the right form for the purpose. Be clear about the content required for the audience and be able to manipulate the grammar and presentation conventions."*

Miss L wrote on the questionnaire that she was much less confident about the knowledge needed by beginner readers and writers. In reading she felt they needed:

"To know how to handle books. That writing and pictures carry meaning, and how and that groups of letters make spoken words, and how they do it." Writers needed. *"To know marks on paper communicate ideas, to link letters with sounds and to have something to say"*

These views emphasise the importance of meaning and are consistent with Miss L.'s beliefs and practices. In the quiz Miss L was able to identify nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions and articles, scoring 14, slightly higher than the median for effective teachers. She could identify some syllables and morphemes, but not phonemes, sounds or onset and rimes. She said that this concerned her, as she has been working with the school Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator to set up a phonics programme for some of her struggling readers and had felt quite confident in her understanding of phonics. Miss L was able to separate accent and dialect, and to discuss the differences between Standard English and a dialect. She scored 22 on the children's author recognition test, rather better than the mean of 18 for the effective teachers. Miss L was very successful at identifying features and differences in the quiz samples of children's reading and writing. She identified content, detail and genre features first in the writing passage, then picked out the sentence structures, use of punctuation and spelling. In the reading she identified all the errors and inferred cue use drawing information from both the miscues and the retellings.

5.8 Common characteristics

Both of the teachers we have highlighted here had characteristics in common - ones which we found were more widely shared by our sample of effective teachers of literacy. In summary, these were:

- Both valued their experiences in initial training and/or professional development, and particularly their roles as English co-ordinators, feeling that they had been given the opportunity and the motivation to reach a deeper understanding of good practice in teaching literacy.
- Both had made their classrooms highly literate environments, featuring attractive and stimulating displays of texts of various kinds. The features of these environments were heavily used by the children.
- Both used a shared text (read or written) as a vehicle for the teaching of specific aspects of reading and writing e.g. phonics and spelling.
- Both deliberately brought out connections between the levels of language knowledge involved in reading or writing that text.
- Both were clear and focused about what they intended to teach.
- Both made clear to pupils the aims of the lesson and referred to these in the introductions and conclusions of lessons.
- Both emphasised the function of units of language in the context of an example of written language.
- Both used a mixture of whole class and group based teaching in their lessons.
- Both taught lessons in which all children were engaged in literacy activities for the whole time.
- Both had planned literacy tasks which the whole class would eventually complete with appropriate support.
- Both had a strong belief in the priority of meaning making in teaching reading and writing.
- Both had a good knowledge of children's literature but neither were able to segment sounds in the abstract context of a test.
- Both were very successful in identifying relevant features in samples of children's reading and writing.

5.9 Summary

In this chapter we have exemplified some of the major findings emerging from the project by offering two detailed case-studies of effective teachers of literacy. These teachers, like all our sample of effective teachers, were demonstrably effective in that they could demonstrate above average literacy learning gains in the children they taught. We also observed them teach two literacy lessons which were clearly very effective, the flavour of which we hope comes across in our descriptions.

Chapter 6

Novice and expert teachers of literacy

6.1 Introduction

In addition to researching the characteristics of effective teachers, we also made a similar study of student and newly qualified teachers of literacy. Our hypothesis was that teachers of literacy would not have become effective solely through possessing well-developed subject knowledge; nor would they have become effective only by acquiring extensive experience of teaching literacy in primary schools. Instead, a synthesis of particular aspects of their knowledge, training and teaching experience would support or constrain the development of effectiveness. Thus one of our key research questions asked what aspects of initial training appeared to support these novices in becoming effective at teaching literacy. We went about answering the question by gathering evidence in the following ways:

- a questionnaire survey of 75 students training to be primary school teachers at two higher education institutions. The students were all taking Post-graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) courses, and were in their second term when the questionnaire was completed. The questionnaire was similar to the one administered to the effective and validation teacher samples in the main study;

- observation of literacy lessons given by 11 PGCE students during their final teaching practice. The 11 trainees had a range of subject backgrounds, and the lessons observed included both key stages 1 and 2;

- interviews with the students whose lessons we observed. They were asked about particular aspects of the lessons, and how they had learned particular teaching strategies and forms of classroom organisation, and how and why they had chosen the content of lessons;

- follow-up observations of literacy lessons and interviews with six newly qualified teachers in their first year of teaching;

- a literacy quiz, described in a previous chapter (and in Appendix 2), was completed by the newly-qualified teachers.

In this chapter, we outline our findings concerning these novice teachers, and discuss the differences and areas of similarity which emerged between them and the sample of effective teachers. In particular, we discuss their beliefs about literacy teaching, their subject matter knowledge, the range of practices in literacy teaching which they had experienced during the PGCE year, and the teaching strategies and techniques observed in the lessons. Details of the trainees' background, derived from the questionnaire, is outlined in Appendix 3.

6.2 Subject knowledge for teaching literacy

Responses to the questionnaire revealed a range of qualifications and subject background among the students in the study. All had completed a first degree, and some a higher degree or diploma. Among the sample chosen for observation and interview, there were a number with a first, or higher degree in English or Linguistics. Of the latter, at least two were also training to specialise in primary English. Thus some of the novice teacher sample had substantial content knowledge in English language and literature, whereas others were learning new areas of content at the same time as learning how to teach them to primary pupils.

We have argued earlier that literacy is not a subject as such, with a clear disciplinary framework, distinct bodies of knowledge and procedures; but rather that a number of disciplines and bodies of knowledge contribute to the content knowledge needed to teach literacy. We have suggested also that content knowledge for teaching literacy is complex: the study of English at degree level, or even to A

level in school, does not necessarily guarantee the requisite knowledge to teach literacy effectively. Equally, effective teachers of literacy were not always able to express their knowledge for teaching literacy explicitly, in formal academic terms. Our findings in relation to the effective teacher sample did not seem to support the Shulman model, in which teachers drew on their knowledge of the content and procedures of subject disciplines, selecting from and transforming this knowledge in order to represent it to pupils. We suggested earlier that effective teachers of literacy often appeared to have highly contextualised and implicit knowledge, and that for many teachers', their content knowledge did not exist separately from their pedagogical content knowledge. This was described in detail in Chapter 2.

In the study of novices, we aimed also to examine the relationship between their subject knowledge and how they were learning to teach literacy. We asked each of them specific questions about how and when they had learned to teach features of literacy observed in lessons; and also what aspects of their previous knowledge had been particularly helpful in learning to teach the features observed. These questions were intended to parallel the ones asked of the effective teacher and validation samples about their training and professional development.

Although the sample of student novices was relatively small, detailed qualitative analysis of lesson observations and interviews indicated an interesting phenomenon in relation to subject knowledge and literacy teaching. Some novices bore a striking similarity to the effective teachers in their ways of knowing the content needed to teach literacy; whereas others matched more closely the Shulman model, in which subject knowledge is selected and transformed for representation to pupils as pedagogical content knowledge. The novices who were able to make clear connections between the content of their academic subject and the knowledge needed to teach literacy all had degrees in English or Linguistics. However, degree level study in English or Linguistics did not guarantee that novices would draw upon, or make clear links with their own subject knowledge and ways of teaching reading and writing. Those who were less able make the connection between content and procedural knowledge gained in academic study of language or literature and their classroom practice were all teaching pupils at key stage 1. Such students found it harder to identify specific ways in which knowledge gained in their own academic study had informed their literacy teaching with younger children. Instead they focused far more on the things they had learned during their PGCE year; both in university/college and in school.

For example, Miss W had a first degree in English and was observed teaching Year 1 pupils sentence and word construction, using a sentence-maker from the *Breakthrough to Literacy* scheme, and was asked about the knowledge underpinning her teaching and where she had learned it:

> *'I wouldn't say anything from my degree has helped. From college/university...[PGCE course] we covered phonics...and the different approaches [to the teaching of reading]...we learned about methods and stages of writing... and it's from school..[during the PGCE course]. No it doesn't seem particularly relevant, my degree, to actually teaching. Obviously a knowledge of grammar and things, but that isn't what you learn in a degree anyway....[my] knowledge of grammar is from my days at school.'*

Similarly, student-teachers who did not have a strong academic background in language and literature, also referred to the PGCE course as the source of knowledge underpinning their choice of content, or teaching strategies. It appeared that they learned the content needed to teach pupils at the same time as they learned how to teach it. Thus their subject content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge were not always clearly distinguished. We have already indicated that this was also the case for the majority of effective teachers.

There were a number of novices who reflected more closely the patterns identified in existing theories on the knowledge bases needed for effective teaching. There was evidence that these individuals drew on their own formal academic subject knowledge in English literature and language, selected appropriate material, transformed and represented it in a form appropriate for the pupils they taught. A further important point was that in these cases, the student-teachers were able to identify and articulate explicitly the process of transformation: how they drew on their academic subject knowledge, selected appropriate content, chose ways of representing complex conceptual knowledge

to pupils. All the novices who were found to do this were teaching pupils at key stage 2. Examples of this phenomenon are outlined below.

Miss R

Miss R had a first degree and an MA in English Literature, she was undertaking a primary PGCE course which offered a specialism in English. On the two occasions she was observed, she was teaching a key stage 2 class. After the first observation, she described how she had selected the content of lesson which involved introducing a dance from Tudor times, working out the dance steps with the class, and then translating them into clear instructions in modern English. The content was chosen because it related to a class topic on the Tudors and Stuarts, and was part of a series of lessons on language use in Elizabethan and Jacobean times and the differences between language then and now. Miss R described also how she had previously done work on simile, metaphor and the symbolism of flowers, in which an edited version of a speech by Ophelia in Hamlet had been studied by the class. She had discussed the purpose of figurative language and symbolism, and how ideas and feelings could be conveyed in a number of ways. She drew pupils attention to the differences between figurative and poetic uses of language, and forms, and contrasted these with the language structures and forms needed to communicate information clearly and succinctly, for example in instructions.

Miss R. drew pupils' attention to specific lexical and grammatical differences between Elizabethan and modern English, and introduced more complex conceptual knowledge. For example, attention was drawn to the differences between forms of writing which aimed to get things done, or convey information, and the conventions of more elaborated, poetic written forms, which often employ symbolism, metaphor and simile to create a particular effect, or develop a sequence of ideas or feelings. Miss R. also discussed with the class the different expectations of Elizabethan and modern audiences. After the lesson, she told us that the pupils had a high level of awareness of language and the ways in which it could be used. Because of this, she had introduced them to the sonnet form of poetry, and in particular the Elizabethan/Jacobean sonnet, using the Shakespearean form as an example and model:

> *'Their use of language is amazing. I've also written sonnets with them...They'd not done a lot of rhyming poetry; they'd done more modern, not very traditional stuff, without any rhyme. Some of them found the sonnet form very frustrating...it's very highly structured. But the sort of work some of them have produced...I'm absolutely flabbergasted. We didn't talk about iambic pentameter: I didn't want them to focus on the rhythm, but it's surprising how many of them have, unconsciously. We did the Shakespearean [sonnet] form to tie in again with the Tudors... What I found important was that I told them it had to be a garden that they came across, to give them a notion to [start out with]. I said to them "Write your poem first and then we'll try to re-phrase...and get the end right."...The results were fantastic, and again it was their love of language, they love working into the nitty-gritty, and they found it such a challenge to find rhymes that weren't sun bun... the obvious.*
>
> *Int. Did you give them a model to work with?*
>
> *Miss R: I gave them a Shakespearean sonnet.*

In the above examples she drew upon her academic knowledge base of the content and structure of Elizabethan and Jacobean poetry and drama, and in particular her detailed knowledge of the text of Shakespeare's plays and poems. She also drew upon her knowledge of how symbolism is used, generally and more specifically in the Shakespeare text she chose. Miss R. selected an example (a section of Ophelia's speech) of figurative use of language, and symbolism which she felt would illustrate the point to her pupils. She transformed this knowledge by presenting and explaining examples in a way which would be accessible to the class, and by asking them what feelings and ideas they associated with particular flowers and plants, and whether they would have chosen the same ones as Ophelia. Similarly, in her account of the introduction of the sonnet form, she had chosen from her knowledge, content related to poetic form, and the structure of the sonnet. This was presented to pupils in a way which drew upon their previous experience and knowledge, and related it to previous

work they had done with her. The class was then given an opportunity to examine and discuss an example of a sonnet and to experiment at creating their own.

There were a further examples of a student-teachers drawing on both content and procedural knowledge in an academic subject.

Miss D

Miss D had a joint first degree in English and History and was doing a general primary PGCE. She was able to identify how her own knowledge of the substance of English as a subject, and the accepted processes in understanding, analysing and writing complex literary texts informed and underpinned her choice of content and approach in teaching aspects of reading and writing. We observed a lesson taught by Miss D. to key stage 2 pupils. This involved them reading a segment of text and highlighting, with coloured pens, particular features which indicated to a reader how it was organised and structured. They were then required to discuss how the author had chosen language to create a particular effect for the reader. Pupils were asked to identify specific words and phrases in the text, and to indicate how features such as punctuation and paragraphing contributed to the overall effect.

When asked how she had learned to do this, Miss D made the following observation:

> *'I can remember doing this myself when I was studying; because if I photocopied a chapter from a book, I would go through and highlight the bits [of text] that I needed [to indicate a particular effect or stylistic device]'*

She also made explicit connections between her own knowledge of the content of English literature and her teaching:

> *'In Drama yesterday I started doing Hamlet with Year 5; thinking about the themes in plays and [particularly] the theme of revenge in Hamlet. We brought it into a modern-day context in thinking about bullying and was it justified getting revenge? Do you gang up on people and do the same back to them? if I hadn't [studied] Shakespeare and done a lot of work on the plays, I wouldn't have had that...knowledge to put into it....it really helps if you have a real knowledge of a play or novel, it makes it so much easier to plan and to [identify] your targets and objectives.'*

Once again, the novice had selected content or procedural knowledge from his/her own subject background, selected what was appropriate for a particular lesson, and found ways of representing that material in a way which was relevant and accessible to the pupils taught. Miss D. identified one of the key procedures in analysing texts which she had learned from her study of literature and adapted and applied the principle to a text suitable for a lesson with key stage 2 pupils.

Although the two examples above indicate that the student-teachers' content knowledge was largely literary, there was a further example of a student-teacher with a degree in Linguistics who also directly drew on, and transformed, aspects of her own knowledge of the content and procedures of her subject in order to teach pupils at key stage 2.

Miss C

Miss C was observed teaching a lesson with a Year 5/6 class in which the content of the lesson was the difference between standard English and non-standard variations. The concepts of language variation according to geographical region, and of language change over time, were both introduced (as indicated in the model of English language identified in the Kingman Report (DES, 1988)).

Miss C. introduced different examples of spoken English and got pupils to identify different words and grammatical structure; she also introduced them to the difference between accent and dialect, emphasising that dialect involved lexical and grammatical difference. Pupils were then given some examples of Devon dialect and asked why these examples were heard less often nowadays, she then indicated why and how the range of traditional dialects has been eroded in Britain, and how the

language has become much more standardised. The class were then introduced to the text of a poem in dialect, which was first was read aloud by a parent from the appropriate part of the United Kingdom. Miss C then explained the idea of a glossary to help readers understand more easily. She worked through the first verse with the whole class, identifying the dialect words and grammatical structures to be represented in the glossary and offered explanations of them. After that, pupils worked independently, in pairs and threes, choosing words and phrases for the glossary and constructing explanations and paraphrases in modern standard English. At the end of the lesson, there was then a plenary, whole class session to report back what each group had done, and a reminder of the words and concepts that had been covered in the lesson.

Miss C was able to explain why she had chosen to represent these aspects of subject content, and why she had chosen to do it in that way:

> *'I think the whole point [is] to make them aware of language and how it is used. I want to make it explicit rather than [it be] implicit, so they have an explicit knowledge, so they can talk intelligently [about language]. Many of the reasons I would do grammar with them are not because I want them to learn rules about things, but because I want them, for example, to be able to say 'Roald Dahl's use of adjectives means that he achieves a certain effect'. That is my aim in teaching language... because I think their knowledge is implicit, they need the language to talk about language.'*

She identified the importance of helping pupils to make explicit existing implicit knowledge of language structure at word and sentence level. Her own subject knowledge provided the basis for choosing both the content and processes which she represented to pupils, and transformed in such a way as to relate it to their experience and interests. She was aiming to get her pupils to act as linguists do, and use similar procedures and processes in analysing language.

Each of the examples above offers an instance of novice teachers choosing, representing and transforming for pupils, aspects of both the *syntactic* and *substantive* structures of a particular knowledge base. There is no obvious explanation as to why there were no examples of novices teaching at key stage 1 who used their own subject knowledge in the ways outlined above. Possibly the gap between the content and procedures of formal academic study in language and literature and the immediate knowledge and skills needed to teach the beginnings of reading and writing to younger children seemed too wide for them to make the connection easily.

In comparing the findings relating to the novice teachers with those on effective teachers' subject knowledge, it is important to bear in mind that all the novices whose practices are described above had completed their academic study relatively recently. The novices were preoccupied with learning to teach during their training and during their first year in post, and so it is unsurprising that the they were often able to offer a more detailed account of exactly how and when they had learned to teach particular aspects of literacy, than were many of the effective teachers who had trained a long time ago. A large majority of the effective teacher sample had completed their formal academic study and initial training more than fifteen years previously, and it is less likely that they would remember specific aspects of their experience then which informed their teaching now. It is also possible that effective teachers took for granted some areas of their expertise, and assumed that they, and most other teachers, had always had the requisite knowledge and ability, or had picked it up along the way, as they gained experience in teaching. The novices were not yet at this stage and were more aware of themselves as learner and novice teachers. It is also important to bear in mind that the content and structure of training experienced by the novice teachers was different from that of the majority of effective teachers: there have been substantial changes to the content and structure of courses which train primary school teachers during the last 20 years.

6.3 The literacy quiz

As part of the second interview, the novice teachers were asked to complete the same literacy quiz as that administered to the core samples of effective teachers of literacy and validation teachers. Although the number of novice teachers followed up in the second phase of observation and interview,

who were by then in their first teaching post, was too small to offer generalisable conclusions, there were some interesting patterns in the responses.

In the section of the quiz which asked respondents to pick out word classes, the novice teachers had scores ranging from 1 correct to all 16 items correct. The majority had scores between 9 and 16. The median score was 10.25. The lowest score was a novice teacher who did not have an academic background in language or literature, and the one with the highest score had a first degree in Linguistics. Thus there was a wide range in the extent to which the novice teachers could identify classes of words. It was interesting to note that the two novice teachers with the highest scores on this section of the quiz, and on the section requiring identification of the morphemic and phonemic structure of words, were both observed teaching lessons which specifically focused on sentence, word and sub-word levels of content. This will be discussed in greater detail in the section on novice and teachers' practices.

The word segmentation exercises in Section 2 of the quiz were more problematic for the group: of a possible 22 correct items, they scored between 7 and 16 and the majority were in the 7-12 range. This is an area in which there was unfamiliarity not only with the terminology, but also with the process of segmenting words into constituent phonemes; and syllables into onsets and rhymes.

In the sections of the quiz which dealt with knowledge of the differences between standard English and non-standard variations, accent and dialect, and the use of language, there was also a wide difference in the knowledge of the novice teachers. All identified some aspects of the difference between accent and dialect, although not all identified that dialects differed grammatically as well as lexically. When presented with an example of non-standard variation of English, only the novice teacher with a degree in Linguistics identified all the differences between this example and standard English (the differences included word inflections, verb structure, use of the present tense for narration).

A further section of the quiz, as described earlier, required the recognition of authors of children's literature. From a possible 25 correct author names, the novice teachers scored between 15 and 22. The median score was 17.75. Clearly all had a reasonable knowledge of the range of authors of children's fiction and some had a very good knowledge. The novice teacher with the strongest academic background in literature also scored highest on this item.

Although the novices were still relatively inexperienced in the teaching of literacy, a number of them had high levels of subject content knowledge appropriate for the teaching of literacy, as indicated in detail in the examples of practice, and interview discussions of lessons, outlined earlier in this section. These individuals were able to make clear connections between their own subject knowledge and the content needed to teach literacy pupils at key stage 2. For those with a similar background, but teaching pupils at key stage 1, the connection between their own academic subject knowledge and literacy teaching was less apparent. This group of novice teachers, and the ones without any particular academic background in language and literature, tended to rely more heavily on the content of their PGCE courses for choosing what to teach and how to teach it. The role of specific aspects of initial training which helped them to teach literacy will be discussed later in the chapter.

6.4 What children need to know about literacy

In addition to examining the subject content knowledge of novice teachers and its relationship to their practice, we also examined what they felt pupils needed to know about literacy.

In the questionnaire, the student teachers, as with the effective teachers of literacy, were asked to describe what they considered children needed to learn about reading and writing at two stages: - (i) when they first encountered literacy, and (ii) at the start of key stage 2. By getting them to consider the knowledge children needed, we aimed also to gain some insight into what the novice teachers actually knew themselves about reading and writing.

As the data obtained from this section was open-ended (respondents could write whatever they wished in response to the questions), we coded the responses for analysis. Based on the statements made by

the students, we grouped together responses which seemed to be saying the same things. In all, there were 47 different categories of response about reading, and 58 about writing. Closer analysis of the data indicated two larger categories of response. The first of these included responses which focused on the technical systems for encoding and decoding meaning in written language: for example, knowledge of the structure of sounds; knowledge of letters and their correspondence; and the structure and organisation of sentences and longer stretches of text. In contrast, the second group of categories prioritised affective knowledge about reading and writing: for example, that books carry meaning; a familiarity with a wide range of texts; recognition that reading is enjoyable, and the ability to read with expression and fluency.

The analysis showed that novice teachers, like the effective teachers of literacy, differentiated clearly between the knowledge needed by children beginning to learn literacy and by those at the beginning of key stage 2.

Concerning the knowledge needed by pupils at key stage 1 in reading:

- 43.8% mentioned aspects of the technical knowledge of the structure and correspondence between sounds, letters and words, or the structure and organisation of sentences or longer passages of text.
- 32.2% mentioned knowledge related to the enjoyment of books, or that books carried meaning.

For pupils at key stage 2 in reading:

- 47.6% emphasised knowledge of a wide range of texts, and appreciation of reading as a meaningful and enjoyable activity;
- 16.4 emphasised technical knowledge of the structure of sounds, letters words and their relationship, and the structure and organisation of sentences and longer passages of text.

In relation to the knowledge about writing needed by pupils at the beginning of key stages 1 and 2, novice teachers also differentiated between the different kinds of knowledge needed at the two key stages. For beginner writers, the following were mentioned most frequently:

- Letter formation (17.7%)
- Writing carries meaning (12.6%)
- Knowledge of writing directionality (9.1%)

For Key Stage 2 children the priorities were different:

- Punctuation (10.5%)
- A range of forms and structures in writing(8.9%)

Analysis suggested that the student teachers had a range of knowledge about children's needs in learning to read and write; and that they recognised differences in pupils' needs according to age and experience. However, the patterns were not the same as those found in the analysis of responses of the effective teachers of literacy. The order of priorities held by the novice teachers in relation pupils' knowledge was, in fact, strikingly similar to teachers in the validation sample.

The comparison between the effective teachers of literacy and the validation sample teachers echoed the comparison between the effective teachers and the students. The effective teachers seemed to focus first on children's understanding of reading and writing as symbolic processes, and then on their detailed knowledge of the technical systems and structures for encoding and decoding meaning in text. For novice teachers, these priorities were more likely to be reversed.

In addition to the questionnaire, we also included an item in the literacy quiz given to the novices in their first year of teaching. This required the analysis of examples of children's reading and writing, comment on the effectiveness of the children's reading and writing and the strategies used. As with the effective teachers and the validation sample, given time and prompting, most of them identified and commented on the major differences between the two pieces of writing, and made a satisfactory judgement of effectiveness. However, the approach taken by almost all the novices was strikingly similar to the pattern identified in the validation sample. The novices tended to comment on items in the same order as the validation sample: focusing first on sentence and word level features of the writing, particularly the use of capital letters, full-stops and commas, and spelling and choice of

words, followed by comment on the organisation and structure of the two pieces of writing, and an evaluation of their relative effectiveness. We have argued earlier that the first few minutes of a teacher's evaluation of pupil's writing is probably the most crucial, and thus the features to which teachers give priority may be important.

There was no clear pattern to the novices' evaluations of the examples of children's reading. Like the validation sample teachers, the novices tended to comment on the use of graphic and phonic cues using more general expressions, but they also showed greater similarity with the effective teachers in the comments they made about the pauses found in the two children's reading of the passage. Several made inferences about the purpose of the pauses and what they indicated about the child's strategies for reading the text. In considering the children's comprehension of the two passages, indicated in their retelling of what happened in the story, most of the novice teachers commented on the children's ability to predict the story, and were able to make inferences from this about the children's understanding. Some, but not all, commented on the choice of vocabulary and the logic of substitution of words in the text. Some of the novice teachers were clearly more skilful at synthesising the different features of the readings into an accurate evaluation of the children's reading strategies and levels of comprehension; all were able to tackle the task with reasonable confidence. It seemed apparent that most of the novices were still developing their skill in this area.

6.5 Beliefs about the teaching of literacy.

We hoped that responses to the attitude statements in the questionnaire about the teaching of literacy would reveal the underlying belief systems of the novice teachers, which could then be could then be compared with those of effective teachers of literacy. As described earlier, this part of the questionnaire was divided into two sub-sections: the first contained a series of attitude statements reflecting six hypothetical theoretical orientations towards the teaching of reading and writing; the second asked for views about the likely usefulness of teaching activities which followed from the different theoretical orientations.

From our analysis of the questionnaire responses, there was no evidence that these novice teachers had well-defined or coherent belief-systems about the teaching of literacy. They tended to endorse each of the theoretical orientations to literacy, and most of the teaching activities suggested. Observation of lessons also indicated that there was a wide range of practices being tried out in school by these trainees. From their responses to the questionnaire items, they did not yet appear to have developed consistent working theories about literacy teaching which would inform their classroom actions. The research of the Leverhulme Primary Project into student teacher development (Bennett & Carre, 1993) also indicated this phenomenon and, indeed, Carre (1993) found that it was not until well into their first year of teaching that novice teachers tended to develop consistent personal theories about teaching. This is in clear contrast to the effective teachers of literacy, who had developed coherent positions on the teaching of literacy, and taught in ways which fitted these belief systems. In our study, novice teachers appeared to be in the process of formulating and modifying beliefs and experimenting with different practices in the classroom.

6.6 Novices' practice in teaching literacy

In the questionnaire the novices were asked to indicate which of a selected list of teaching activities they had used in school. The list was drawn up to represent activities likely to be used in a systematic and balanced approach to literacy teaching.

Of the activities suggested, only flash cards and letter string exercises were reported as having been used by fewer than a quarter of the group. Most of the activities had been widely used, which seems to suggest that the group had been employing a wide and balanced range of teaching activities.

As with the effective teachers, the students were also asked to list a further three activities used for teaching reading and, additionally, for teaching writing. A very wide range was reported; activities were grouped into the categories below.

- those which focused on the organisational contexts in which reading/writing were done, e.g. children reading in project work, group reading, teacher scribing for children, children writing during dramatic play;
- those which focused on the reading/writing of different modes and genres e.g. reading taped books, reading non-fiction books, form filling, writing poems;
- reading activities which focused on children's critical and evaluative responses to texts, e.g. looking at bias, discussion about favourite authors;
- whole text comprehension, e.g. prediction activities, reading to answer questions, drafting and revising, rewriting from one genre/mode to another;
- sentence level work e.g. sentence building, grammar exercises, punctuation exercises;
- work on words or parts of words, e.g. alphabet activities, word-building games, spelling exercises, vocabulary study.

The proportions of activities mentioned in each of these six categories is shown in table 6.1. They thought they taught a range of written modes and text types, and thought they organised the teaching of reading and writing in a variety of ways. This was a similar pattern found in analysis of the reported practices of effective teachers, although they placed even more emphasis upon the methods of organising reading, and the teaching of different modes of writing and text types, but less emphasis on text level work in reading.

The questionnaire responses indicated that novices mentioned more frequently text-level activities than sentence or word level activities. However, the effective teachers' indication that they used fewer activities at sentence and word or sub-word levels was found to be misleading when compared with observations of classroom practice. The effective teachers were observed to teach a good deal of word and sentence level material, but frequently it was embedded within work on whole texts and was not identified as the primary aim of a lesson. Analysis of the lessons by the novice teachers observed indicated a similar pattern: they tended to identify text-level work as the global aim of the lesson, and as the major focus. However, often where text-level activities had been indicated as the main aim of a lesson, there were also embedded sentence and word level tasks and learning objectives. Overall, the majority of lessons observed by the novice teachers followed this pattern. The lessons in which this was not the case, and in which the primary aim and focus of the lessons was word, sub-word or sentence level work were largely with pupils at key stage 1. The one exception was a lesson with a year 5/6 class on the grammatical and lexical differences between standard English and non-standard variations.

Activity category	Reading activities mentioned by student teachers	Reading activities mentioned by effective teachers	Writing activities mentioned by student teachers	Writing activities mentioned by effective teachers
Contexts	38.8	59.4	17.4	15.4
Forms	17.5	15.5	48.8	62.4
Word level	7.8	12.2	8.1	9.1
Sentence level	1.9	2.5	3.5	2.0
Text level	23.3	5.6	18.6	10.6
Critical response	5.8	4.1	------	------

Table 6.1: Comparison between % of novice teachers mentioning types of teaching activities and % of effective teachers.

As with the effective teachers of literacy, in many instances the novice teachers were embedding work at word and sentence level within the framework of whole texts. In none of the observed lessons did novice teachers give discrete exercises on sentence structure, grammar or word construction. In the best examples of lessons, student teachers were clearly making efforts to make connections between the different levels and to help pupils towards an understanding of not only *how*, but *why* sentences are structured in a particular way; how syntax and word choices affect meaning; word families and relationships; how words are structured, and can be changed by the addition or removal of affixes and inflections; sound and spelling patterns; simple and complex punctuation.

The ways in which both effective and novice teachers were making connections between different levels of language knowledge accorded generally with the framework developed within the National Literacy Project (HMSO, 1997: 11), in which it is suggested that *'...text level work provides the essential context for much of the work at the sentence and word levels.'* However, more attention may need to be given to making explicit the relationship and possible connections between text, sentence and word level work in the planning of specific lessons, and also in the setting of longer term goals for pupils' learning, particularly for pupils at key stage 2.

6.7 Lesson structure and teaching strategies

In one of the observations of novices' lessons, we deliberately focused on structure and organisation, identifying specific teaching strategies in literacy. In interview the novices were asked about the structure of lessons and specific teaching strategies; and were asked to identify where they had learned how to do these things.

Within majority of lessons observed, a clear pattern of lesson structure could be discerned. With some variations this tended to consist of:

- an initial whole-class plenary session in which the novice engaged in direct teaching of all pupils in the class together. In some lessons this served the purpose of introducing new work, or activities to pupils; whereas in others it served the purpose of reminding pupils of work undertaken in previous lessons and developing and extending previous work. The initial plenary sessions tended to end with instructions to pupils for the next stage of the lesson.

- a period in which pupils worked in smaller units: individually, in pairs or small groups, working on tasks outlined by the teacher in the plenary phase. During this period most of the novices monitored pupils progress in the tasks, offered support, or direct instruction to individuals and groups, or re-oriented some of them back to the task: a key element in the monitoring, support and also direct instruction was the use of questioning.

- a whole-class, teacher-directed, final plenary session to round off the lesson. In the more purposeful lessons this stage often involved pupils in reporting back, evaluating progress or identifying work still to be done. In many of these final plenary sessions examples of good work completed in the lesson was shown to the whole class, with discussion on why it was a good example. Overall the final plenary served the purpose of summarising what had been done in the lesson and marking how far the class had got in relation to the lesson aims.

When individual novices were asked how they learned to structure and organise their lessons in this way, most reported that it was a combination of things they had learned in university/college sessions on lesson planning, and practices they had observed in school, or had discussed with their class teacher or mentor. How novices learned and what helped most will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

There were a number of teaching strategies observed. In a number of lessons, the novices demonstrated, or provided a model of a particular feature of reading or writing or aspect of language. Miss A, for example, read a book in large print with key stage 1 children, and asked questions such as 'What is this book called; what's it's title?' 'Where does it say that?' 'Who is the author?' 'Who can tell me what an author does?' 'I wonder what the story might be about?' As she asked the questions, she also pointed to the relevant bits of text such as the title, the author's name. She then began to read the story from the book, pointing to the words as she read them. From time to time she stopped and asked the children questions about the story, about particular words and letter combinations in the text.

Another example was Miss C, teaching a key stage 1 class which had visited the Bude life-boat crew during the previous week. They were about to write letters of thanks to their hosts. Miss C talked to the children about letters and how they were set out and what needed to be in them. She then demonstrated how the address was written, and whereabouts on the paper it should be placed; she

stopped to ask the children if they thought it was correct, whether the words were spelled correctly, and whether anything else was needed in the letter.

Other teaching strategies were also observed, such as:

- Questioning to clarify whether a pupil had requisite knowledge or understood a point. E.g. *'Where do we put the address, where did I write it in our letter on the board?'*
- Questioning to extend or develop pupils' thinking, to offer fuller explanations of phenomena, or to get them to reflect of why something might be as it was, or the relationship between one thing and another. E.g. *'Do authors always do that: can you think of any examples where they don't?' 'How do we know how the Elizabethans performed those dances?'*
- Inviting pupils to explain what they meant or why they had done something in a particular way. E.g. *'What made you do it that way?' 'How did you know to put the emphasis on those words, when you read it aloud?'*
- Re-orienting pupils back to a task. E.g. *Let's go back and check that was all it said in the book; did the question ask you anything more?*
- Offering explanations. E.g. *'With instructions we use words as economically as possible, so that it is clear for the reader to follow. If there are too many words, and they are not clear, they won't be able to do the task; that's why you need to choose the most precise words.'*

6.8 The assessment of literacy

We aimed to get information about the novice teachers' experiences of a variety of approaches to the assessment of literacy development and how these might differ from those of more experienced teachers.

They were asked to indicate, against a list of approaches to assessment, which they had encountered in school, or during the university/college-based part of their course. The summaries of their responses are given in Table 6.2 and can be compared with those of the effective teachers of literacy. The figures represent the percentage of both groups who said they had either encountered that approach during their course (students) or used it often (effective teachers).

Assessment strategy	Student teachers	Effective teachers
Teacher-made tests	61.3	39.9
Tests from published schemes	58.7	7.0
Standardised tests	76.0	14.5
Marking written products	76.0	53.1
Miscue analysis	77.3	26.7
Running records	77.3	58.8
Observation of children	96.0	93.2

Table 6.2: Comparison between % of novice teachers using particular assessment strategies with % of effective teachers

The figures suggest that most of assessment strategies listed had been experienced by the students during their courses, with observation being experienced by almost all. The figures do not give an indication of the assessment strategies which novices would choose when they began their teaching careers, but do indicate that they had been given the information upon which to base such a choice.

The students we observed were keen to talk about assessment and monitoring in their lessons, and had clearly identified it as a particularly challenging area:

> *It's informal. I haven't written down what they've done. I will go back through their work.'*

> *'During a session like that you can't really assess everybody's learning. I take a few children... you could look at one pair, one having great difficulty and the other who didn't have difficulty and see how they worked together, who was doing all the work. Who was pulling who forward or back.... you can assess like that but you can't watch them all.'*

Most of them talked about observing and monitoring children during the session, with four also indicating that they would look at the written product at a later point. More than half identified the ways in which they would record observations.

All were aware that they should be undertaking some assessment and recording as part of the requirements of their courses: two explained that they were finding it difficult to manage, and five had challenged themselves and extended their practice in this area. The chief challenge perceived was that of managing the assessment and recording of literacy, rather than knowing about the techniques. This, they seemed to feel, they had addressed in a number of ways:

> *'On my first teaching practice, because the school didn't have any assessment and monitoring policy in place, I played around with them and had a go with all the different things I could do - the ones that had me tearing my hair out at the end of the day, and ones which I felt were going to be useful. I think that I've come to the conclusion, and (the LEA) advisers are saying the same at the moment, I gather, that focusing on 5 children a week is all you can do in a larger class. Here they're changing all their assessment techniques to the ones we've done on the course so the staff meetings are interesting and I've been able to contribute.'*

It appeared that, in the approaches to assessment experienced during their training courses, students frequently were given a head-start in relation to common assessment practices in many schools.

6.9 What had helped novices learn to teach literacy?

As indicated already in this chapter, in both rounds of observation and interviews we asked the novice teachers in our sample how they had learned particular aspects of literacy teaching. We also asked what aspects of their previous academic study and PGCE course had been helpful in learning to teach literacy. We have discussed already the relationship between subject content knowledge in language and literature learned during study for a first or higher degree; in this section, we discuss what particular aspects of their PGCE courses, or other experience, had been helpful in learning to teach literacy. In each case, when novices said aspects of their courses had been helpful, we probed further and asked them to give specific examples.

Although we were not able to categorise these novice teachers according to their effectiveness in teaching literacy, it was clear from observations and interviews that some were more effective than others. Their lessons, for example, varied in terms of the degree of order maintained, the clarity and appropriateness of their aims, their structure and organisation, the levels of engagement with the work shown by the pupils, etc. An interesting phenomenon emerged: the novices who appeared to be teaching literacy most effectively were also most likely to be able to articulate the connection between their PGCE courses (in relation to both University/college and school-based elements) and their practice in teaching literacy. They were also usually able to specify exactly how their training had helped them in learning to teach literacy, and, moreover, what they still needed to learn.

In contrast, two novices who conducted poorer lessons (in our estimation) appeared unable to make the connection between aspects of their training and their practice in teaching literacy. These two novices were following PGCE courses in different institutions, were teaching different age-phases, and had different subject specialisms. When questioned how they had learned to teach as they did, or where they had learned to organise the pupils in a particular way, both stated that they drew on memories of their own primary school education, and one, her/his secondary school education. Neither of these two novices had a strong academic background in language and literacy; one, who had specialised in mathematics, said that she felt her own subject background in English was weak. She appeared not to be able to draw upon aspects of her training, either the school or university/college-based elements, to help her to teach literacy. Interestingly, other students in the same PGCE year group were able to indicate how aspects of their training had helped to underpin their literacy teaching. What then was happening in the case of novices who taught more effective literacy lessons, that was not happening with the two poorer examples?

Most of the novices who were able to articulate and specify how and what had been most helpful in learning to teach literacy, identified a similar process, outlined below and exemplified by the comments from interviewees:

1. Material was introduced to them in the college-based part of their courses, namely:

- Specific literacy content, including: the regularities of sound-symbol correspondence and phonological patterns; the range of reading and writing expected of children at key stages 1 and 2; concepts about print and awareness of literacy processes.

  'We covered phonics in college and the different [aspects] of teaching [reading] phonic, whole word ... but I've learned also from watching other people.'

- Concepts such as differentiation and progression; issues and techniques in assessment and recording.

  'Right at the beginning of our course we had a lecture on differentiation ...it [focused on] different ways of imparting information ideas to different levels and abilities. It was a new word and was actually spelled out for us, so that we wouldn't get it wrong!'

  'I think that university college was brilliant at introducing us to so many types ... of assessment techniques'.

- Guided practice in processes such as choosing and structuring appropriate lesson content, planning individual lessons, sequences of lessons and schemes of work.

  'When we were in [university college] we did quite a lot of work with X on planning a unit of work around fiction or poetry. So she he would give us exercises , for example, plan a four-week block of work using a novel or poem and she he gave us a pro-forma [structure] ...which made you concentrate on ... teaching children how to read the book ... not just reading a story for the sake of it.'

  "Well university college has been useful in relation to setting clear objectives, also I've followed the documentation to the letter of how to set up a lesson, how to cover the objectives. They've also showed us how to assess according to your objectives."

- Teaching strategies and forms of classroom organisation, such as: lesson introductions, transitions, lesson endings, whole class and group activities, questioning, monitoring children's progress in lessons.

  'In all my experience in university and in school we were taught to go around and make sure everyone is on task... and seeing teachers doing it too'.

2. Observation of experienced teachers/mentors doing the things to which they had been introduced previously. For example, observing the use of particular teaching strategies, or forms of classroom organisation; observing teachers recording and assessing children; and also having the opportunity to ask questions and discuss aspects of experienced teachers' practice.

   'I think it's really important to see other people do it first. Especially in PGCE because it's only a year's course, and a lot of people come in quite cold...haven't had that much classroom experience...To sit down and observe someone, and think about the way that they are doing it...I found that really useful...being able to do that first. Then you were broken in very gently to it, and you got a chance to try out these ideas knowing that if it didn't work somebody was going to be there to say "This is where you went wrong"...and to think "This is where I went wrong, well maybe next time I'd do it like that"'

3. Students putting into practice the ideas, processes and strategies to which they had been introduced, after having observed experienced teachers doing similar things, and after the opportunity to discuss observations with teachers. And, after putting into practice the particular aspects of literacy teaching, they indicated the importance of evaluating the relative success of their literacy teaching, perhaps with a school mentor or university/college supervisor, with the opportunity to make changes and modifications for future teaching.

> *'I think all the courses at {university college} ...are oriented so you have an input, you know the process... then going through and consolidating is a major process... It {the PGCE course} has been beneficial and they both {university college and school-based elements} reinforce one another which is really good, because you are learning - you're not getting two mixed messages on what to do. So it is helpful.'*

Some novices indicated that stages 2 and 3 had occurred in reverse order, but most indicated that the sequence above was ideal.

They were asked also whether any *one* element of the above had been the most important: for example, having practical classroom experience, or watching experienced teachers. In each case when asked this, individuals replied that it was neither observation, nor practical classroom experience alone, but rather the combination which had helped them not only to cope with teaching literacy, but also to understand why and how particular things worked, or did not work, and furthermore how they could improve their teaching.

A further point was that more successful novices indicated that they tended to draw upon knowledge and experience gained in their university/college courses when they were in a situation where they needed to use and apply it, and at that point they were able to make strong connections between conceptual and practical knowledge. In the less successful lessons which we observed, the novices seemed less able to make links between university and school-based work, and appeared less able to synthesise different aspects of the training course in order to inform their own teaching. They also seemed to draw on experiences which were more distant in time, and probably remembered only sketchily, such as their own experience of primary school.

The key aspect for most of the novices seemed to be the ability to choose relevant knowledge learned in the PGCE course and to apply or adapt it to new circumstances, and in some cases to extend the knowledge further. Some students drew on academic knowledge gained in first or higher degrees, but none indicated that this was the sole source of help in learning to teach.

6.7 Summary

The major findings to emerge from this part of the research were:

- Novice teachers did not yet appear to have developed coherent theoretical positions regarding the teaching of literacy. They had a range of views about literacy teaching but had yet to pull these together into a working theory about which could inform their actions in teaching literacy. This contrasted with effective teachers of literacy, who had developed a variety of coherent theoretical positions, and were able to synthesise these into a working philosophy which underpinned their teaching.

- Novice teachers had a range of knowledge about children's needs in literacy and how it needed to be differentiated to take account of pupils' age, ability and experience. Their priorities in terms of what children needed to know were much closer to those of the validation sample teachers than those of the effective teachers of literacy.

- They appeared to have a reasonably strong subject knowledge in literacy. Some had highly-developed academic knowledge in language and literature; others indicated that they had gained the requisite knowledge during their PGCE year.

- The novices with highly-developed knowledge in subjects related to literacy, who taught pupils at key stage 2, were able to transform and represent this as pedagogical content knowledge, according to the pattern outlined by Shulman and associates (e.g. Shulman, 1987). By contrast, those with a strong academic background in a literacy-related subject, who taught pupils at key stage 1, did not conform to this pattern: they were less likely to make connections between their formal academic knowledge and that needed to teach literacy to younger children. Instead this group tended to cite their PGCE course as the source of the knowledge needed to teach literacy. This was also the case with novices who did not have an academic background in language or literature, whether they taught pupils at key stages 1 or 2.

- Most helpful to novices in learning to teach literacy, was a coherent combination of knowledge and practical experience. This tended to consist of:
    1. initial introduction to, and practice with, key areas of content, concepts, issues and processes in the teaching of reading and writing, most usually done in the university/college-based parts of the PGCE course;
    2. followed by, or parallel with, observation of experienced teachers doing the above; with the opportunity for discussion after observation;
    3. followed by the opportunity to practise, in the classroom, the content, techniques and processes learned and observed, and with opportunities for discussion with teachers/university college tutors afterwards, to enable evaluation of performance; to identify strengths and weaknesses; and to set targets for future performance and achievement in literacy teaching.

Chapter 7

Becoming an effective teacher of literacy

7.1 Introduction

We have described the ways in which the knowledge, beliefs and practices of effective teachers of literacy differed from those of a validation sample of teachers and from those of novice teachers. One of the aims of the project was also to identify the origins of these underpinning factors. Consequently we investigated the professional development experience of the effective teachers in our sample.

A number of types of data were collected to examine these issues. The questionnaires administered to the original 228 effective teachers of literacy and to the 71 members of the validation sample asked about qualifications and perceptions of professional development. In addition to this, those teachers interviewed were asked about what had contributed to their development, both generally, and with reference to particular teaching strategies and techniques. Both these sources of evidence indicated what the teachers themselves viewed as influential. Other factors, not perceived or given importance by the teachers, may also be significant. In addition to interviewing the teachers we also interviewed the headteachers of all the teachers in our sub-samples about their support for the development of these teachers' effectiveness in literacy teaching.

From this data, the following findings emerged as the most significant:

- The effective teachers of literacy were more likely to have a subject background in English language and related subjects.

- Experiences during initial teacher training had now been largely forgotten by the effective experienced teachers and so little can now be inferred about the quality of this training. The more recently qualified effective teachers, however, did value the training they had received in teaching literacy. This suggests that initial training does have an important impact upon teachers' approaches to and success at teaching literacy, but that this is inevitably short term. This point may be particularly significant for teachers' content knowledge. Most of the novice teachers we studied had a reasonably extensive content knowledge but few could genuinely be described yet as fully effective teachers of literacy. It may be that this knowledge would be a major factor underpinning the development of their expertise, and would eventually be merged with their pedagogical understanding and, ostensibly, forgotten.

- Experience of longer in-service courses and participation in long term literacy projects had significantly affected teachers' views about literacy teaching. The most significant feature of these longer term experiences appeared to be that they had provided the opportunity and impetus for the teachers to develop and clarify their own personal philosophies about literacy teaching.

- Shorter courses were also seen as useful in professional development, but largely in terms of meeting a personal need or keeping in touch with recent developments.

- Effective teachers were more likely, and possibly more able, to discuss their views about literacy teaching as a philosophy and to make explicit links between their beliefs and their teaching practices.

- The role of English co-ordinator was very significant to the effective teachers. It was a focus for in-service provision of a certain type and had also generated substantial commitment to the area of teaching. Simply being the English co-ordinator meant that these teachers had experiences which involved them:
    1. being perceived as experts by their colleagues,
    2. being given the status of expert practitioner in teaching literacy in their schools,
    3. being offered more extensive in-service course experiences in literacy,

4. having the chance to observe other teachers teach literacy, with a view to offering advice and support,
5. often being involved in delivering in-service to their colleagues, with the consequent need to think through actively the material they were presenting.

- Teachers not in the fortunate position of being the English co-ordinator in their school were more likely to be relatively deprived in terms of in-service opportunities in literacy. Such deprivation is unlikely to enable these teachers to develop and increase their professional expertise in teaching literacy.

7.2 Teachers' subject backgrounds

There were some clear differences between the effective teachers and the validation teachers in terms of their subject backgrounds.

A similar proportion of teachers in each group had qualifications at A level (71.1% of effective teachers and 70.4 % of validation teachers) and the number of qualifications for each individual who had A levels was similar. However, 66.7% of the effective teachers had A level qualifications in subjects relevant to the content knowledge of literacy teaching (English, languages, linguistics, and communication studies) whilst only 46.4% of the validation teachers had such qualifications.

Of those teachers with degrees, 37.8% of the effective teachers reported that the main subject of their degree was English, languages or linguistics, subjects likely to have relevance to the content knowledge of literacy teaching. Only 10.3% of the validation sample listed these as their main degree subjects.

However, none of the teachers mentioned their A level or degree studies as a source of professional development or preparation when interviewed. Whatever the longer term effects of such subject backgrounds, the teachers themselves did not perceive them as very influential upon their subsequent teaching of literacy.

7.3 Initial Teacher Education

The general pattern of teaching qualifications of the teachers who filled in questionnaires reflected the age of the teachers in both samples, with the majority holding a Certificate of Education. Around a quarter of both samples had BEd or BA (QTS) degrees, with a smaller number having PGCE qualifications. There was little detectable difference between the two samples.

Possibly because many of them had completed it so long ago, initial training was rarely reported by any of the teachers as an important feature in their development as teachers of literacy. The experienced teachers who mentioned their ITT usually did so as a contrast to their later experience.

> *"When I first started teaching, because I didn't know how to teach reading it was a big worry for me. ... The PLR (primary language record) was the thing, in about 1986. I was involved with the pilot it made me think, really think, why am I doing all this? I don't think I am the sort of person that says there is only one way. I think I've always known there are lots of ways. I think what I'm convinced of now is that whatever way you use has got to be the one you believe in."*

> *"I trained 20 years ago and at college they did not really teach us that you taught reading. You got this impression that the scheme did it - Ladybird. Then I was lucky enough to be involved in a conference. It was just like seeing the light. The fact you are making a role model ... luckily I managed to get the other 8 infant teachers interested and there was an excellent support network in Southampton then. We did not spend masses and masses of money on books, but we learned to use them differently. That conference and one on writing later were an inspiration. It was the professional assumption on somebody's part that we know what we are doing and why we are doing it."*

In the sub-samples of teachers observed and interviewed, we deliberately included several with less than five years experience. Some of the more recently qualified effective teachers of literacy did mention their initial teacher training courses, one to enthuse about the approach to teaching taken by a particular lecturer and another to praise the practical nature of the tasks she had undertaken during her PGCE English course. One of the validation sample also praised the practical nature of her initial training.

7.4 Professional development experience

A section of the questionnaire aimed to construct a picture of the sort of professional development the effective teachers of literacy had experienced and to compare this with that experienced by the validation teachers. We also invited teachers to offer views about the usefulness of the types of professional development in literacy that they had experienced and the literacy content included. Key features of what they said are reported in the following sections.

7.4.1 The duration of in-service experiences

Most of the teachers responding to the questionnaire had undertaken some in-service training focused on the teaching of literacy during the previous school year: 81% of the effective teachers of literacy and 70.4% of the validation teachers. The major difference between the two groups was in the number who had experienced substantial amounts of such in-service training. 16.8% of the effective teachers of literacy had experienced more than 5 days compared to only 2.8% of the validation teachers.

At interview all the effective teachers of literacy said they undertook literacy focused in-service regularly and also participated in local support networks and literacy projects. They were also likely to belong to centres and support groups. Several mentioned long courses, such as 20 day GEST, Diploma and Masters' modules as a significant influence on their practice, although these may have taken place some time ago. They suggested that such courses had given them opportunities to examine their assumptions about literacy carefully and relate them to their practice. Only one of the validation sample mentioned this type of professional development in literacy.

The effective teachers of literacy also said they found regular attendance at shorter courses useful, but for different reasons. They suggested these courses were likely to "keep them up to date" and in contact with new requirements in literacy teaching, rather than offer a focus for examining their views and practices.

7.4.2 Source of in-service experiences

Teachers were also asked in the questionnaire about the source of the literacy related in-service training they had undertaken in the past year. Both groups had experienced in-service training organised by the school, by the LEA, by a local university or college and through distance learning. The proportions of each group claiming to have experienced each of these types are shown in the following table.

Source of in-service training	Effective teachers experienced (%)	Validation teachers experienced (%)
School	72.2	81.7
LEA	74.9	66.2
Higher Ed.	16.3	11.3
Distance learning	5.3	1.4

These figures suggest that whilst many individuals in both samples had participated in a range of literacy orientated in-service opportunities, the effective teachers of literacy were more likely to have done in-service work organised from outside their schools.

The validation teachers tended to rely on school-based INSET provision.

The effective teachers generally talked positively about the LEA in-service courses they had experienced.

> *"So I would say that the in-service courses (the LEA) run are excellent. They've got a good English team and I would say they have helped enormously. Some sessions are specifically for language co-ordinators, some for primary teachers in the borough. They come into school, the support team. They do really good practical sessions that we see the point of."*

They also praised LEA based support from advisers and advisory teachers within the school. The small number who had been involved with longer term literacy courses at local Universities also spoke enthusiastically about these.

7.4.3 Forms of professional development experience

Teachers were asked for their views about a variety of types of provision for professional development in literacy. They reported having experienced a range of types although the effective teachers were more likely to have taken part in literacy related lectures, workshops and guided research. The validation teachers were more likely to have experienced in-service sessions led by colleagues and to have observed other teachers in action. This distinction reiterates the finding presented earlier that the effective teachers were more likely than the validation teachers to have experienced in-service courses outside their own schools.

Of the forms of professional development work they had experienced, all teachers found that being given the opportunity to try out new ideas in the classroom was most useful. The only major difference between the two groups here was in their rating of guided research in literacy. The validation teachers who had experienced this found it much less useful than their effective colleagues. (Full details of the ratings given by each group to forms of professional development experience are given in Appendix 3.)

7.4.4 The content of professional development in literacy

In the questionnaire we asked teachers to identify the areas of literacy teaching in which they felt their professional development had been particularly useful. In a list of nine content areas teachers were asked to note those in which they had experienced professional development and to rate the usefulness of their experience of that content. The following table shows the percentage of both groups who had experienced professional development in each content area and the percentage who had found this useful.

Content area	Effective teachers experienced (%)	Effective teachers rating these useful (%)	Validation teachers experienced (%)	Validation teachers rating these useful (%)
Phonological awareness	86.3	87.4	77.1	91.4
Knowledge of grammar	84.4	66.5	72.2	65.9
Reading for information	94.4	90.9	85.7	83.3
Writing purposes and forms	96.9	98.6	97.1	93.7
Spelling development	92.1	90.0	80.0	86.5
Reading processes	96.2	95.8	91.0	91.7
Writing processes	97.8	97.2	92.3	96.7
Assessment	97.7	89.1	95.3	83.3
Children with literacy problems	90.6	85.3	82.8	88.6

The figures indicate that, with the exception of the content areas 'assessment' and 'writing purposes and forms', the effective teachers were slightly more likely to have had professional development experience in these important aspects of literacy teaching and learning.

The majority of teachers from both groups had found their professional development experience related to these topics useful and there were no major differences between the two groups' ratings. The area which both groups seemed to have found less useful was *knowledge of grammar*.

To investigate these findings further, we probed teachers' responses to their in-service training during interview. The teachers did not find it easy to talk about the content of professional development in general questioning. Completion of the literacy quiz, however, did stimulate teachers to talk about their experience of work on grammar. Of the 26 effective teachers, 12 said that they felt they had learned the knowledge about language used for the quiz, in particular the word classes, but had been unable to retain this knowledge.

> *"I did know all this stuff. We did courses on it a few years back. You know, when it was, well, when the LEA were really keen on this sort of thing. Of course it was before I was into English so much. But I just don't use it, so of course it's gone. I don't know that I need it but I know that if I do need a particular word I can look it up. I've done that in the past, mostly when I taught juniors. I make really sure I know what I'm talking about before I do it with the kids. Its like the science now, isn't it?"*

> *"I was OK on it straight after the course, but it is impossible to remember for some reason. I really believe it's because it simply isn't how we do it in class. I mean, if I get ideas from a course. Or if the content of a course is really relevant to school I do use it. I was very interested when I did that KAL (knowledge about language) course because I felt I improved my own knowledge. But this detail is not the sort of thing I would use in class or the others (other teachers) are going to benefit from me bringing back."*

> *"I remember doing all this at secondary school. It was so boring then and I haven't used it since, so of course I am a bit out of practice. I do know what I need for the classroom but I wouldn't feel this is relevant to me at KS1 now so that's probably why."*

Most of the validation teachers gave very similar explanations for their feelings about what they recognised as their difficulties with the content of the quiz. Two of these teachers said that they had had a good grounding in this sort of thing at school and they felt it had been useful to them in their teaching, although they did not do noticeably better on the quiz than the others. Two others of the validation sample said they felt that they needed help in this area and that it would improve their teaching if they knew more about grammar.

The results of the questionnaire and the comments made by teachers suggest two main problems with training courses about KAL or grammar. Firstly, teachers may fail to perceive the relationship between explicit content at their own level in areas such as grammar, and the material they see as important for them to teach. Secondly, if, as our data indicates, effective teachers tend to teach areas such as sentence level work within the context of work on whole texts, they may not make the connection between the grammatical knowledge they are taught on courses and the classroom activities they are accustomed to employ. In-service courses on grammar would seem more likely to have a longer term impact if they were planned with these connections deliberately in mind.

When the teachers were asked during the interviews what experiences had helped them develop their literacy teaching the results were very different for the effective and validation teachers. In some ways this is to be expected, since the validation teachers were all mathematics co-ordinators and a high proportion of the effective teachers were English co-ordinators. However, some broad differences are striking.

Two of the 10 validation teachers said they did not see themselves as teachers of literacy, and others suggested that they did not feel they could be effective in the literacy field as they were mathematics co-ordinators. Given the responsibilities of a primary teacher for the whole curriculum, such a view is, of course, untenable.

Although all the effective teachers were able to talk about their development, they all found it difficult to relate particular factors in this to their current teaching practice. They named many more factors in

their development and were much more likely, for example, to talk about their personal philosophy of literacy teaching. A number could name turning points in their development as literacy teachers which related to this personal philosophy. These fell into a number of categories:

- particular courses they had attended
- particular course techniques (particularly a practical approach)
- particular materials or the need for new materials forcing them to review their approach

It was notable that many of the KS1 effective teachers made long comments about particular reading materials and phonic programmes to explain why they did or did not fit with the way they taught. This often seemed to be a real focus for strong feeling about theoretical issues. In particular they questioned the extent to which children learnt to apply the phonic rules they were working with in published phonic programmes. This criticism links with the finding earlier described that these teachers tended to teach phonics in relation to larger units of text.

7.5 **Becoming the school English co-ordinator**

One of the most important factors in the development of the effective teachers of literacy was undoubtedly becoming the school English co-ordinator.

> *"Taking on the role of co-ordinator, I've tended to, I've thought to myself, "well, I'm going to find out more" so I've read more, I've looked into things more and, I can't say when it happened, I've started to look more at what the child can do I think I take into account more what the child has to do, the skills they need. In my first few years I probably would have introduced things but not been aware of the skills the child would need."*

They gave a number of possible reasons why this was significant:

- support from school colleagues

> *"Being part of staff teams who are open to new ideas, but analysed them for me before we actually got on any bandwagon. We had people who were deliberately devil's advocate. I remember when we were going for a new approach at my previous school. We talked about it at length, got in advisors who helped us and sorted it out amongst ourselves, but there was not one person who just said "Oh the old fashioned ways are the best" Luckily, I've always worked with people who want to know what's best and form their own opinions."*

- being able to see what colleagues in and out of school did in class- something they felt would only be possible for the co-ordinator. (The opportunity to watch other teachers of literacy in action was also highlighted as useful by the novice teachers we studied.)

> *"I think it's the opportunity to go and see other people doing it. From being English co-ordinator and having responsibility for something. Once a term we have a day for us. I mean it might be doing files and paperwork. But on the other hand I do like to try and go and see other people. You do pick up ideas of how to do things. I've learnt a lot more about Y3 and their abilities from going over to the infant school and seeing Y2. I'm KS2 trained but seeing the ways they read and their sessions and the stimulus in the classroom. I try to recreate that in my teaching."*

- becoming part of a network of co-ordinators who kept in touch
- receiving regular bulletins and support from county advisory staff and services
- personal interest
- becoming involved with initiatives such as the Primary Language Record or literacy projects

There does seem to be a great difference in the type, duration, content and forms of CPD offered to English co-ordinators and to other teachers in the schools we visited. One teacher expressed her concern about this issue:

"But I'm afraid its all gone wrong, because the only courses you get to go on are consultant courses. I'm finding that as the language consultant I'm expected to go on courses concerned with language but the other members of staff don't get those opportunities, whereas I feel when I was younger I could go on any courses I wanted. So I'm concerned that they're not doing enough basic in-service about language."

Such a concern, if accurate (and the evidence of our research is that is does represent a common pattern), suggests a worrying 'vicious cycle' in the professional development experience of teachers who are not English co-ordinators for their schools (with, naturally, a parallel 'virtuous cycle' for those who *are*.) Teachers who do not exhibit particular strengths in the teaching of literacy, and who therefore are unlikely to be selected as English co-ordinators, are less likely to be given access to the in-service experiences which can help them strengthen their teaching of literacy. If an aim of continuing professional development is to try to make *all* primary teachers effective teachers of literacy, then this feature of course provision seems to need some attention.

7.6 Other factors

At interview, many of the teachers offered very general explanations of their development as effective teachers of literacy and were unable to select the significant factors.

"Well, mainly by watching other teachers I suppose. Certainly, since I've been here I've had the opportunity to watch other teachers working and have picked up things from them otherwise - experience. Trying things out as you go along and finding certain things work and developing them really."

"I do read a lot of things. I read a lot of research and the Times Ed. and I see what everyone else is doing and I like trying out different things to see what works for me."

"A combination of seeing other teachers teach, reading books and experimenting in my class to see what works best. So there's no one single factor, it's what works best. It's mostly articles and stuff I read these days, although I do look at the books I had when I trained 6 years ago. I had a Margaret Meek one that really influenced me."

When probed about the important aspects of their professional development in the last academic year the effective teachers of literacy were most likely to identify a particular course, school-based session or the opportunity to discuss school based matters with colleagues. The validation teachers were more likely to identify the support of another member of staff and the opportunity to talk to other members of staff.

7. 7 Headteachers' support for teachers of literacy

The 18 headteachers of the 26 effective teachers and 10 validation teachers were interviewed about these teachers. They cited a number of experiences which had contributed to the effectiveness of their colleagues, most frequently mentioned in the case of the effective teachers of literacy being INSET outside school or participation in projects about literacy. For the validation teachers the most frequently mentioned factor was advice from colleagues in various forms. This difference fits with the evidence from the teachers themselves that they had been most affected by external INSET or involvement in projects (effective teachers) or school-based in-service (validation teachers).

The headteachers also identified measures they had taken to support their colleagues' professional development as teachers of literacy. These were all factors identified by the teachers as important to their professional development, although individual headteachers did not necessarily choose the same factors as the teachers. In the case of the effective teachers the most frequently mentioned measures were in-school structures such as staff meetings and working parties (mentioned by 30.7% of the heads of the effective teachers) and arrangements for teachers to undertake out of school meetings such as co-ordinators meetings and in-service courses (26.9%). The heads of validation teachers were generally more vague about supporting their staff member in literacy, with 54.5% mentioning school events such as whole school planning and policy making.

7.11 Summary

From our study of these teachers, a clear distinction emerged between the effective teachers of literacy and the validation teachers in terms of the professional development experiences they had had. In general, the effective teachers had been offered opportunities, beyond those provided in school, to extend and develop their knowledge and expertise in the teaching of literacy. For the validation teachers these opportunities tended to have been limited to those provided in school. Much of this difference can be accounted for by the fact that most of the effective teachers of literacy we studied were, or had been, English co-ordinators in their schools, a position of relative privilege in terms of access to literacy focused professional development. The clear implication of this finding is that, to raise expertise levels in all teachers of literacy, some professional development opportunities at least need to be channelled to those teachers not already identified as expert.

Chapter 8

Conclusions and Implications

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter we shall present the conclusions arising from this research project and then outline what we perceive to be the major implications for future policy and practice. Our findings are based on close examination of the work of a sample of teachers whose pupils make effective learning gains in literacy and of a more random sample of teachers whose pupils make less progress in literacy.

We will begin by outlining the conclusions of the research in the order in which they were presented in previous chapters. We will then try to synthesise these conclusions into an overall interpretation of our main findings about the characteristics of effective teachers of literacy before going on to discuss the implications of our work for continuing professional development and for future research.

8.2 Teachers' subject knowledge in literacy

- All the teachers we worked with knew the requirements of the National Curriculum well and could describe what they were doing in terms of these.

- They all also recognised the different literacy teaching needs of KS1 and KS2 children.

- There were differences between the teachers from the validation sample of Mathematics co-ordinators and the effective teachers in their specifications of what children needed to know about reading and writing. The effective teachers in general placed a greater emphasis on children's recognition of the purposes and functions of reading and writing and of the structures used to enable these processes. The validation teachers, on the other hand, were more likely to emphasise technical knowledge about these structures. This should not be taken to imply that the effective teachers gave less attention to language structures in their teaching but rather that they were more concerned to contextualise their teaching of these and to present them functionally and meaningfully to children.

- All the teachers had limited success at recognising some types of words in a sentence and some sub-word units out of context. The effective teachers were more likely to be able to pick out word types such as adjectives, adverbs etc. but less able to identify such units as phonemes, onsets and rimes and morphemes. Using more everyday terminology for these units still did not ensure total success for the teachers in recognising them. This casts doubt on the effective teachers' abstract knowledge of linguistic concepts such as phoneme and raises the question of whether they would be even more effective if they had such knowledge.

- Despite this apparent lack of explicit, abstract knowledge of linguistic concepts, these teachers were observed to use such knowledge implicitly in their teaching, particularly that connected with phonics. Our interpretation of this contradiction is that the effective teachers knew the material they were teaching in a particular way. It did not seem to be the case that the teachers selected appropriate ways to represent (pedagogy) pre-existing knowledge (content) to children. Rather, they appeared to know and understand the material in the form in which they taught it to the children, which was usually as material which helped these children read and write. The effective teachers' knowledge about content and their knowledge about teaching and learning strategies were integrated. The knowledge base of these teachers thus was their pedagogical content knowledge. This is rather a different idea from that of Shulman (1987) who sees pedagogical content knowledge as a way of transforming subject content in order to represent it for others. At the time we studied the effective teachers, their knowledge in literacy took precisely the form in which they represented it for their children. They may, of course, once have known this material differently. But, through experience of teaching it, their knowledge seemed to have become totally embedded in and banded by their teaching practices.

- When examining and judging samples of children's reading and writing, all the teachers were able to analyse mistakes. But the way the two groups approached the task was different:
    1. the effective teachers were more diagnostic in the ways they approached the task and were more able to generate explanations as to why children read or wrote as they did
    2. in examining the pieces of writing, the two groups eventually mentioned similar features, but the effective teachers were quicker to focus on possible underlying causes of a child's writing behaviour
    3. the validation sample required lots of prompting and time to reach an equivalent point. It is likely that, in a busy classroom context, they would not routinely make the same level of judgements made by the effective teachers.

  This suggests a further aspect of subject knowledge in which the effective teachers of literacy performed better: the knowledge of children and the ways they exhibit skills or skill problems in literacy.

- We also found that teachers used a limited range of linguistic terminology and the way the two groups of teachers used this terminology was different. The validation teachers tended to rely on definitions of the terms they used whereas the effective teachers tended to begin by demonstrating particular language features in use within a clear context before deriving a definition, which might well be arrived at in discussion with the children. Children in the classes of these teachers were thus much more heavily involved in problem-solving and theorising about language for themselves rather than simply being given 'facts' to learn.

8.3 The belief systems of effective teachers of literacy

- The effective teachers of literacy tended to place a high value upon communication and composition in their views about the teaching of reading and writing: that is, they believed that the creation of meaning in literacy was fundamental. They were more coherent in their belief systems about the teaching of literacy and tended to favour teaching activities which explicitly emphasised the deriving and creating meaning. In much of their teaching they were at pains to stress to pupils the purposes and functions of reading and writing tasks.

- Although they emphasised purpose and meaning in their belief statements, this did not mean that the more technical aspects of reading and writing processes were neglected. There was plenty of evidence that such aspects as phonic knowledge, spelling, grammatical knowledge and punctuation were prominent in the teaching of effective teachers of literacy. Technical aspects of literacy tended, however, to be approached in quite different ways by the effective teachers than by most of the teachers in the validation sample.

- The key difference in approach was in the effective teachers' emphasis on embedding attention to word and sentence level aspects of reading and writing within whole text activities which were both meaningful and explained clearly to pupils. Teachers in the validation sample were more likely to teach technical features as discrete skills for their own sakes, and did not necessarily ensure that pupils understood the wider purpose of such skills in reading and writing.

- Our finding concerning the beliefs of this group of effective teachers of literacy, that they prioritised the creation of meaning in their literacy teaching, thus reflects not that they failed to emphasise such skills as phonics, spelling, grammar etc. but rather that they were trying very hard to ensure that such skills were developed in children with a clear eye to the children's awareness of their importance and function.

8.4 The teaching practices of effective teachers of literacy

- There were some differences between the reading activities likely to be employed by the effective teachers and the teachers in the validation group. The effective teachers made more use of big books in their teaching; they were also more likely to use other adults to assist their classroom

work. The validation teachers made more use of phonic exercises and flashcards, although both groups were similar in the extent to which they reported and were observed to teach letter sounds. The difference was in the ways they went about this. The effective teachers tended to teach letter sounds within the context of using a text (often a big book) and to use short, regular teaching sessions, often involving them modelling to the children how sounds worked (by, for example, writing examples of letter groups on a flip-chart). The validation teachers were much more likely to approach letter sound teaching through the use of paper exercises.

- The effective teachers were generally much more likely to embed their teaching of reading into a wider context and to show how specific aspects of reading and writing contribute to communication. They tended to use whole texts as the basis from which to teach skills such as vocabulary, word attack and recognition and use of text features. They were also very clear about their purposes for using such texts.

- In lessons involving writing the differences between the two groups of teachers were less clear although it did seem that the effective teachers were more likely to use published teaching materials as a way of consolidating the language points they had already taught their children, whereas for the validation teachers, these materials were often used to introduce a teaching session. This suggests that a similar point to that made about reading work also applies in the case of writing work. The effective teachers generally tried to ensure their teaching of language features was contextualised for their children and that the children understood the purpose of this teaching. Their chief means of achieving such contextualisation was to focus teaching on a shared text. Language features were taught and explained to the children, as a means of managing this shared text rather than as a set of rules or definitions to be learnt for their own sakes.

- The effective teachers of literacy, because of their concern to contextualise their teaching of language features within shared text experiences, made explicit connections for their pupils between the text, sentence and word levels of language study.

- The lessons of the effective teachers were all conducted at a brisk pace. They regularly refocused children's attention on the task at hand and used clear time frames to keep children on task. They also tended to conclude their lessons by reviewing, with the whole class, what the children had done during the lesson. Lessons which ended with the teacher simply saying, "We'll finish this tomorrow", were much more common among the validation teachers.

- The effective teachers used modelling extensively. They regularly demonstrated reading and writing to their classes in a variety of ways, often accompanying these demonstrations by verbal explanations of what they were doing. In this way they were able to make available to the children their thinking as they engaged in literacy.

- Some effective teachers differentiated the work they asked pupils to do by allotting different tasks on the basis of ability. These teachers also used another approach by varying the support given to particular groups of children when they were engaged on tasks the whole class would do at some point. By this means they were able to keep their classes working more closely together through a programme of work.

- The classrooms of the effective teachers were distinguished by the heavy emphasis on literacy in the environments which had been created. There were many examples of literacy displayed in these classrooms, these examples were regularly brought to the children's attentions and the children were encouraged to use them to support their own literacy.

- The effective teachers had very clear assessment procedures, usually involving a great deal of focused observation and systematic record-keeping. This contributed markedly to their abilities to select appropriate literacy content for their children's needs.

8.5 Novice teachers and the impact of initial teacher training

- Novice teachers did not yet appear to have developed coherent theoretical positions regarding the teaching of literacy. They had a range of views about literacy teaching but had yet to pull these together into a working theory which could inform their actions in teaching literacy. This contrasted with effective teachers of literacy, who had developed a variety of coherent theoretical positions, and were able to synthesise these into a working philosophy which underpinned their teaching.

- Novice teachers had a range of knowledge about children's needs in literacy and how it needed to be differentiated to take account of pupils' age, ability and experience. Their priorities in terms of what children needed to know were much closer to those of the validation sample teachers than those of the effective teachers of literacy.

- They appeared to have a reasonably strong subject knowledge in literacy. Some had highly-developed academic knowledge in language and literature; others indicated that they had gained the requisite knowledge during their PGCE year.

- The novices with highly-developed knowledge in subjects related to literacy, who taught pupils at key stage 2, were able to transform and represent this as pedagogical content knowledge, according to the pattern outlined by Shulman (1987). By contrast, those with a strong academic background in a literacy-related subject, who taught pupils at key stage 1, did not conform to this pattern: they were less likely to make connections between their formal academic knowledge and that needed to teach literacy to younger children. Instead this group tended to cite their PGCE course as the source of the knowledge needed to teach literacy. This was also the case with novices who did not have an academic background in language or literature, whether they taught pupils at key stages 1 or 2.

- Most helpful to novices in learning to teach literacy, was a coherent combination of knowledge and practical experience. This tended to consist of:
    4. initial introduction to, and practice with, key areas of content, concepts, issues and processes in the teaching of reading and writing; most usually done in the university/college-based parts of the PGCE course;
    5. followed by, or parallel with, observation of experienced teachers doing the above, with the opportunity for discussion after observation;
    6. followed by the opportunity to practise, in the classroom, the content, techniques and processes learned and observed, and with opportunities for discussion with teachers/university college tutors afterwards, to enable evaluation of performance, to identify strengths and weaknesses, and to set targets for future performance and achievement in literacy teaching.

8.6 Professional development issues

- The effective teachers of literacy were more likely to have a subject background in English language and related subjects.

- Experiences during initial teacher training had now been largely forgotten by the effective experienced teachers and so little can now be inferred about the quality of this training. The more recently qualified effective teachers, however, did value the training they had received in teaching literacy. This suggests that initial training does have an important impact upon teachers' approaches to and success at teaching literacy, but that this is inevitably short term. This point may be particularly significant for teachers' content knowledge. Most of the novice teachers we studied had a reasonably extensive content knowledge but few could genuinely be described yet as fully effective teachers of literacy. It may be that this knowledge would be a major factor underpinning the development of their expertise, and would eventually be merged with their pedagogical understanding and, ostensibly, forgotten.

- Experience of longer in-service courses and participation in long term literacy projects had significantly affected teachers' views about literacy teaching. The most significant feature of these longer term experiences appeared to be that they had provided the opportunity and impetus for the teachers to develop and clarify their own personal philosophies about literacy teaching.

- Shorter courses were also seen as useful in professional development, but largely in terms of meeting a personal need or keeping in touch with recent developments.

- Effective teachers were more likely, and possibly more able, to discuss their views about literacy teaching as a philosophy and to make explicit links between their beliefs and their teaching practices.

- The role of English co-ordinator was very significant to the effective teachers. It was a focus for in-service provision of a certain type and had also generated substantial commitment to the area of teaching. Simply being the English co-ordinator meant that these teachers had experiences which involved them:
    1. being perceived as experts by their colleagues;
    2. being given the status of expert practitioner in teaching literacy in their schools;
    3. being offered more extensive in-service course experiences in literacy;
    4. having the chance to observe other teachers teach literacy, with a view to offering advice and support;
    5. often being involved in delivering in-service to their colleagues, with the consequent need to think through actively the material they were presenting.

- Teachers not in the fortunate position of being the English co-ordinator in their school were more likely to be relatively deprived in terms of in-service opportunities in literacy. Such deprivation is unlikely to enable these teachers to develop and increase their professional expertise in teaching literacy.

8.7 A interpretation of the conclusions

Our analysis of a wide range of data concerning the teachers we identified as effective teachers of literacy has produced a relatively consistent picture of the characteristics of these teachers and the factors underpinning these characteristics.

Broadly speaking, it seems that the effective teachers of literacy placed a great deal of emphasis on presenting literacy to their children in ways which foregrounded the creation and recreation of meaning. Because meaning was such a high priority, they tried wherever possible to embed their teaching of the crucial technical features of literacy (how to do it) in a context where the children could see why they were learning about such features. This context very often involved the use of a shared text, which was either being read or written together. As this text was being either read or written, the fundamental skills and features involved were being systematically taught by the teachers, for example, phonics, spelling, grammar, punctuation, textual structures and conventions. The teachers were, thus, continually making connections explicit for their pupils between text, sentence and word levels language features. These features were thus taught in a way which emphasised their functions in language rather than their focus being simply a set of rules and definitions to learn.

This functional approach also reflects the form that these teachers' knowledge about written language features took and it seemed that, rather than having learned about these features *then* tried to find ways of presenting them to their children, they knew them in the ways they taught them - as features which enable written language to be produced and interpreted.

Another characteristic of these teachers' approach to literacy teaching was the explicitness with which they set about it. They demonstrated a great deal of literacy to children, modelling the processes of reading and writing but also explaining at the same time the thinking underlying these activities. In this way the children were being helped to become more explicitly aware of why and how they could read and write successfully.

The teachers themselves were very aware of how they were teaching literacy and had generally made very reasoned decisions about this. Many of them had developed strong personal philosophies about literacy teaching and these had come about through a willingness, and the opportunity, to reflect on their practice and the nature of what they were teaching. These opportunities resulted from prolonged study, involvement in literacy projects and/or curriculum responsibility for English in their schools.

Finally, the effective teachers were thoroughly systematic in the ways they went about their teaching of literacy. They were, of course, very familiar with the requirements of the National Curriculum for English and had worked out, with their schools, systems of teaching that enabled them to guarantee appropriate coverage of these requirements. Although a feature of effective teachers' practice, such systems were also used by other teachers, although as a determinant of school planning. The effective teachers were also likely to use diagnostic information about children, their development and literacy progressions as a planning tool. They had well developed systems for gathering evidence concerning children's progress and needs in literacy and then using this to inform detailed planning for future teaching. Such a diagnostic approach often led them to tailor the support they offered to particular children, or groups of children, to ensure that, as far as possible, the whole class covered similar ground in literacy.

In the context of recent developments in the teaching of literacy, in particular, the experience of the National Literacy Project (and its recent broadening into the National Literacy Strategy) and the National Curriculum for Initial Teacher Training, it is important to point out how close most of our effective teachers of literacy were to the model of literacy teaching implied in these developments. The following points are central to this:

- The effective teachers of literacy had an extensive knowledge of the content of literacy, even though this was not generally a knowledge which could be abstracted from the context of their teaching action.

- Because of this knowledge they were able to see, and help their pupils see, connections between the text, sentence and word levels of language.

- The effective teachers had coherent belief systems about literacy and its teaching and these were generally consistent with the ways they chose to teach.

- These belief systems, and hence their teaching practices, tended to emphasise the importance of children being clear about the purposes of reading and writing and of using this clarity of purpose as a means of embedding the teaching of grammar, phonics etc. into contexts which made sense to the children.

- These teachers were teaching literacy in lessons which were clearly focused on this area (literacy hours). Within these lessons they used a mixture of whole class interactive teaching and small group guided work, with occasional individual teaching usually undertaken by a classroom assistant or volunteer helper.

- A good deal of their teaching involved the use of shared texts such as big books, duplicated passages and multiple copies of books, through which the attention of a whole class or group was drawn to text, sentence and word level features. The ways in which they were making connections between different levels of language knowledge accorded generally with the framework developed within the National Literacy Project (National Literacy Project, 1997), in which it is suggested that *'...text level work provides the essential context for much of the work at the sentence and word levels'*.

8.8 Implications for further development

There are several implications emerging from the research in terms of future policy and practice in continuing professional development. These concern the following:

- access to in-service courses
- the nature of professional development experience
- the content of in-service courses
- the nature and content of initial training
- the role of the subject co-ordinator in the school

8.8.1 Access to in-service courses

Over a number of years now there has been a tendency for literacy curriculum specialists (school English co-ordinators) to be targeted for in-service opportunities in literacy. The priorities identified in the annual GEST funding, for example, have been echoed by local education authority provision. This targeting has been implemented for very good reasons. There were clear needs, following the introduction of the National Curriculum, for a heightening of subject expertise and for ensuring that at least one member of staff in a school was sufficiently expert and knowledgeable about the teaching of a subject to be able to offer support and advice to colleagues in this teaching.

There is some evidence from our findings that this policy of targeting in-service opportunities has had a positive effect. The effective teachers of literacy in our sample, over 70% of whom were English co-ordinators for their schools, consistently reported having benefited from the in-service opportunities available to them. They claimed to have been able to pass on some of their expertise through running or organising in-school in-service sessions for their colleagues and through offering general support to these colleagues in such areas as selecting resources for literacy and implementing school policies.

Our evidence does suggest, however, that a rather worrying corollary to this policy has been that teachers who had not been designated as school English co-ordinators were somewhat restricted in the in-service opportunities available to them. For many, these were limited to those arranged within the school, during after-school sessions or on occasional school training days. Given the high value which the effective teachers placed upon their experiences of in-service courses, it seems that non-specialists were missing out on opportunities for their expertise in teaching literacy to be improved. There is a 'Matthew effect' in operation here: the rich (in literacy expertise) tend to get richer, while the poor (perhaps a majority of primary teachers) fall further and further behind the most up to date thinking and practice. This does not seem a satisfactory state of affairs. It is true, after all, that *all* primary teachers are teachers of literacy and, especially in the case of younger children, have an enormous responsibility for ensuring appropriate literacy development in children. Thus it seems to follow that *all* teachers need professional development in this crucial area.

8.8.2 The nature of professional development experience

Two points stand out in this area. Firstly, we have some evidence of the benefits in developing and strengthening teaching expertise in literacy of teachers being brought together in structured discussion groups. These often took the form of regular meetings between teachers from a range of professional situations to discuss particular issues in literacy teaching and a prime example of such meetings were the English co-ordinators' groups which several of our effective teachers belonged to. Working in such groups also sometimes involved watching other teachers teach, and being watched teach in turn. There is evidence from other sources of the positive benefits of such supportive groups. They were at the heart, for example, of the success of the EXEL project (Wray & Lewis, 1994) in developing and spreading expertise in extending children's work with non-fiction texts. They were also vital to the success of national projects such as the National Writing Project and, later, the National Oracy Project. This approach to professional development might be more widely adopted if part of the funds dedicated to continuing professional development were earmarked to support such structured groups, perhaps by allowing teachers to be released occasionally from their class responsibilities to take part in meetings with other teachers for specific purposes.

Secondly, a number of the effective teachers of literacy had experienced involvement either in long courses about the teaching of literacy, such as CAPS or MEd courses, or in literacy projects, such as the development and trialling of the Primary Language Record. These experiences, as well as having given these teachers access to sources of extensive expertise, both personal and resource-based, had also given them the time and space to reflect in a structured way upon their own approaches to literacy teaching and to develop their personal philosophies. Where teachers had worked out philosophies regarding literacy and its teaching, these did seem to act positively as a co-ordinating force in their day to day practices, and this co-ordination in turn led to increased focus in the literacy teaching adopted. Clearly, involving more teachers in longer courses and study programmes in literacy has very significant resource implications and may not be possible to the degree to which might be thought ideal. In fact, there has been a marked decrease over a twenty year period in the number of teachers released from their schools for longer periods of study. What is more feasible, and has emerged as a professional development policy quite recently, is the deliberate facilitation and encouragement of teachers who want to involve themselves more fully in educational research. Such a move towards teaching as an inquiry-based profession is plainly justified by the findings of our research.

8.8.3 The content of in-service courses

The effective teachers in this study reported that they found in-service courses on such topics as grammar less useful than courses on other topics. This is indicative of a more general implication of the research that the most effective in-service content is not that which focuses on knowledge at the teachers' own level, but rather that which deals with subject knowledge in terms of how this is taught to children. Our suggestion earlier was that subject knowledge in literacy should not be conceived as knowledge of content which the teacher then had to decide how to represent to children. Instead it seems from our research that effective teachers of literacy know the content of literacy as pedagogy - that is, they represent the knowledge to themselves through the ways they teach it.

If this is correct, then it suggests that the most effective in-service courses in literacy will be those which focus on the teaching of literacy content and aim to extend the range of pedagogic strategies at a teacher's disposal. This implies a more practical approach and the teachers in this study confirmed that one of the most successful forms of in-service was that which gave them opportunities to try out new ideas in the classroom. This does not mean, however, that in-service courses should be *only* practical - that is, entirely classroom-based. In aiming to develop teachers ability to teach literacy more effectively, they should be mindful of the importance, discussed earlier, of the teacher as a reflective professional. The more teachers are themselves aware of the underpinnings, theoretical and philosophical, of how they act in classrooms, the more likely they are to take a coherent approach to their literacy teaching which seems to pay most dividends. Thus there has to be a place in an in-service course, however practical its focus, for teachers to debate and work out the place of practical ideas in their personal, reasoned armoury of teaching strategies.

Another issue arising from our finding about the relative low effectiveness of in-services courses on grammar concerns the role of linguistic terminology for teachers. While we found little evidence that the effective teachers of literacy had an extensive command of a range of linguistic terminology, it does seem at least possible that having a greater command might help them further improve their teaching of literacy. Having the linguistic terms available might enable then to be more precise in their explanations to children. Certainly, without knowing appropriate terminology, teachers often have to invent ways of describing linguistic phenomena to their children. To quote the Kingman report (DES, 1988), "there is no positive advantage in such ignorance" (p. 4), and it might be useful to find ways of increasing teacher knowledge in this area. However, in view of the findings of the project, we would strongly recommend that such terminology be introduced (or reintroduced) to teachers not as a set of definitions for them to learn but as the embodiments of linguistic functions with a strong emphasis upon the ways these functions might be taught.

Our suggestion as a first step towards increasing knowledge of linguistic terms and associated functions is to take a route which does seem to have had some demonstrable success already. In talking to the teachers in our samples, both the effective and the validation teachers, it quickly became quite plain that they were almost all very comfortable with the language used in the current requirements for the English National Curriculum. Familiarity with the terms of these requirements

has clearly been a necessity for primary teachers as they have legally had to fulfil them. This suggests that embedding a more extensive range of linguistic terminology in other equivalent official documents may well have the effect of ensuring a greater awareness of this terminology, as long as this terminology is described in functional terms.

8.8.4 The nature and content of initial training

The above comments regarding in-service courses in literacy generally apply also to initial training in literacy. A priority here must be equipping novice teachers with an range of pedagogic strategies to enable them to operate successfully in developing children's literacy. But, as with experienced teachers, developing such strategies involves more than simple practical experience. Novice teachers also need to develop an awareness of why and in what circumstances they might employ particular teaching approaches. They need not only procedural knowledge about literacy teaching (knowing how), but also conditional knowledge (knowing when and in what way). The development of this knowledge seems to demand experience in a range of contrasting contexts, together with the opportunity to compare and contrast their experiences with those of others. It would also be useful for them to be taught specific strategies and then given the opportunity to try these out under guidance in classrooms.

Beginning teachers also, if they are to move quickly towards becoming like effective teachers of literacy, need to be given the opportunity and the space to develop their own philosophies of literacy teaching. There is evidence that initial training courses do allow student teachers to 'make their own minds up' about approaches to the teaching of reading (Wray & Medwell, 1994). In the current research, we found several examples of student teachers who were clearly working out their own positions vis à vis the teaching of literacy, although most had not developed coherent philosophies at the time we studied them. For this to happen would, we suggest, require time and further opportunities to read and discuss a range of ideas in literacy.

As discussed above, the effective teachers in our sample were very likely to have experienced some form of involvement with a project on an aspect of literacy teaching. The opportunity to think through issues while working towards a practical outcome appeared to have enabled them to develop more coherent personal philosophies about literacy teaching. It would therefore seem likely to be beneficial if initial training courses could engage students at some point in such project based learning, perhaps a small scale research study, in an aspect of literacy teaching. Many courses already make provision for this on a limited scale but there is evidence (Wray, 1993) that student teachers respond very well to involvement in more elaborate research projects.

8.8.5 The role of the subject co-ordinator in the school

The evidence from this project suggests that, in order to become an effective teacher of literacy, one of the most beneficial steps a teacher could take would be to become the English co-ordinator in his/her school. This puts the teacher into the position of:

- receiving more extensive opportunities for professional development
- having the opportunity to learn from explaining ideas to other teachers and from watching other teachers teach
- being vested with an expertise to which they have then to live up
- being the gate-keeper in the school for new ideas and resources.

Such a position strongly encourages the development of specialist expertise and one suggestion for a way of broadening the possession of this expertise would be for schools to rotate the role of English co-ordinator every few years. In several of the schools we visited as part of the project, such rotation of responsibilities was already practised and the teachers involved were certainly building up their range of curriculum expertise. In one school, for example, four teachers were identified as effective teachers of literacy. Of these, one was the current English co-ordinator, two had been in the past (they were now responsible for other curriculum areas), and one was in her second year of teaching. Rotation of responsibilities (and of year groups taught) was a deliberate school policy and seemed to be having the desired effect of spreading expertise.

8.9 Conclusion

In this research a fairly coherent picture has emerged of the characteristics of effective teachers. We feel there are also some clear implications for policy and practice and have tried to outline these in this chapter. Many of these centre around what might be referred to as a functionalist approach to the teaching of literacy and we see this as our most significant finding. If adopted more widely, we feel this approach has the potential to enhance significantly teachers' expertise and hence children's learning in literacy.

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